

**NEWS: LEICA M9
FULL-FRAME M**



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Saturday 26 September 2009

amateur

Photographer

Nikon D300s

12MP high-performance DSLR



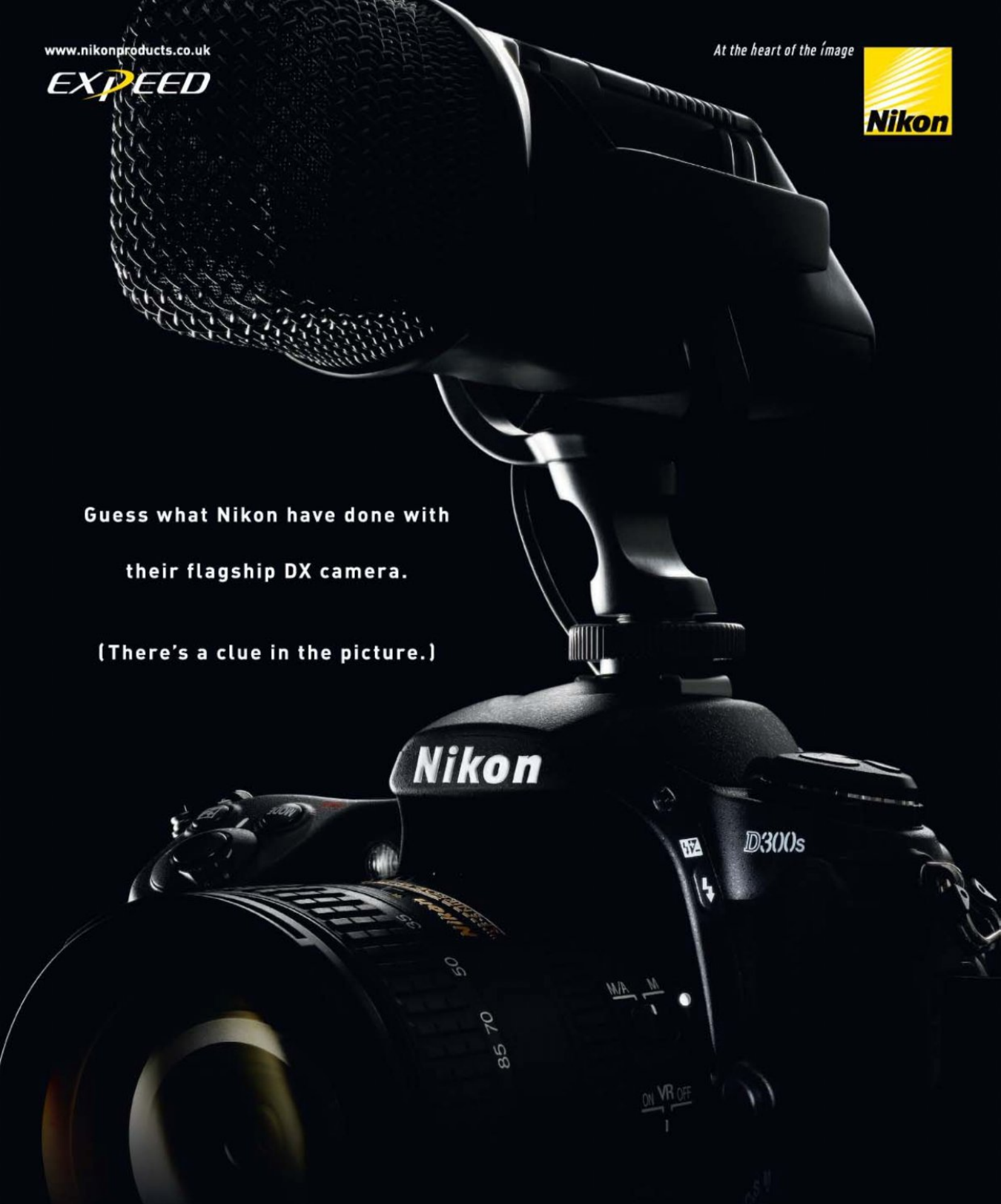
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Tom Mackie's tips on taking great architectural images

© TOM MACKIE

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To have your pictures published in Gallery, send in a selection of up to ten images. They can be either a selection of different images or all have the same theme. Digital files sent on CD should be saved in a Photoshop-compatible format, such as JPEG or TIFF, with a contact sheet and submission form. Visit www.amateurphotographer.co.uk/apgallery for details. We cannot publish images without the necessary technical details. Each RGB image should be a minimum of 2480 pixels along its longest length. Transparencies and prints are also accepted. We recommend that transparencies are sent without glass mounts and posted via Special Delivery. For transparencies, prints or discs to be returned you must include an SAE with sufficient postage.

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Find out how to take great close-ups of classic cars

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© DAVID HANDLEY

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Our address and other contact details

Amateur Photographer,
IPC Media, Blue Fin Building,
110 Southwark Street, London SE1 0SU

AP Editorial Telephone: 0203 148 4138
Fax 0203 148 8130
Email amateurphotographer@ipcmedia.com
AP Advertising Telephone: 0203 148 2517
Email lee_morris@ipcmedia.com
AP Subscriptions Telephone: 0845 676 7778
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Achieving the impossible



Damien Demolder
Editor

'Impossible' is an absolute term, but so often we find it used as a relative. Twenty years ago you could have been forgiven for

thinking that it would be impossible to communicate using a phone that wasn't plugged into the wall. However, with what we know today we can see quite clearly that, while it may have been extremely difficult to make the technology work, it is now something we do almost every day without thinking twice about it.

I suppose it won't be long before we take for granted that a full-frame sensor can be used in a small camera body, and that a short space between the rear element of a lens and that sensor is no barrier to good image quality. For now, though, we should be amazed and be in wonderment at Leica's M9, and the technology that has allowed the company to achieve what so many others would lead us to believe is impossible. To many, Leica is a very old-fashioned company making new versions of old cameras, but while the rest of the industry investigates whether an APS-C sensor can be substituted for the Micro Four Thirds units currently used in mirrorless 'miniature' cameras, Leica has neatly gone one step further.

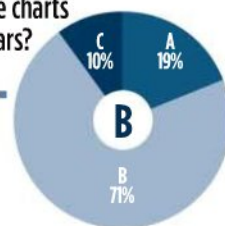
Our question of the week

In AP 12 September we asked...

Do you think the likes of Sony and Panasonic can topple Canon or Nikon from the top of the charts within the next three years?

You answered...

A Yes 19%
B No 71%
C Don't know 10%



This week we ask...

Price and image quality aside, is the Leica M9 the sort of camera you would like to use?

A Yes
B No

Vote online
www.amateurphotographer.co.uk

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News

News | Analysis | Comment | PhotoDiary 26/9/09

“Photographers are getting fed up with carrying around great dollops of cameras”



Photographers ditch DSLRs for an M9, Page 6

First full-frame M digital camera | Leica tackles sensor problems

Leica officially launches full-frame M9

LEICA finally confirmed internet rumours by announcing the arrival of its eagerly anticipated M9, which is the firm's first digital M camera to boast a 'full-frame' imaging sensor.

At the heart of the new M9 is an 18-million-pixel Kodak CCD, developed specially for Leica, which offers an equivalent ISO span of 160-2500.

The 23.9x35.8mm sensor should allow all M-mount lenses on the M9 to deliver the actual focal length stated on the lens (as is the case when used on a 35mm film camera), yet 'without any compromise', according to Leica (see box overleaf).

'The enormous potential performance of the current M-lens portfolio, with focal lengths from 16-135mm, is now fully exploited for the very first time,' said a spokesman.

Leica claims to have addressed the issue of short back focus and the difficulties faced by digital sensors when light approaches from narrow angles. This problem arises when producing a full-frame



sensor in a rangefinder body, where the rear lens element sits so close to the camera's digital sensor.

The M9's sensor uses an 'optimised micro lens design' to 'capture and concentrate even the most oblique rays on the sensor'. This aims to prevent 'image brightness fall-off' at the edges and corners of the image.

Like the M8 and M8.2, the M9's CCD sensor does not feature a conventional built-in anti-aliasing filter but, according to Leica, the new camera does not need to

be used with an accessory screw-in filter.

Leica claims that any moiré patterns are eliminated by the camera's signal processing software.

'At just 139x37x80mm, the Leica M9 maintains the compact size of the M8, despite the considerably larger sensor,' added the firm.

The M9 features what Leica describes as a 'particularly silent' shutter, with a top speed of 1/4000sec. Users can also choose when to re-cock the shutter after release.

The newcomer, which is

SD-card compatible, also boasts a 2.5in LCD screen with 230,000 pixels.

The metering strip on the new M9 uses the same white line as the M8 and M8.2, but is now accompanied by two grey strips either side. Mixing white and grey strips should make the system more reliable.

The M9's housing is made from magnesium alloy and includes a solid brass top and base plate.

The company says it has listened to photographers' demands for 'quick access' to essential features. This includes the addition of an ISO adjustment button, to control ISO without having to go through the menu.

Also on board is an RGB histogram, and a manual sensor-cleaning option that locks the shutter open to allow access.

Out now, the Leica M9 costs £4,850 body only and is available in Vulkanit and 'steel-grey with classic leatherette' finishes.

● For dealers' reactions, plus AP technical comment, see page 6

SNAP SHOT

STOP PRESS

Pentax has announced a 12.4MP HD-video-enabled DSLR called the K-x. The camera will cost around £600 with an 18-55mm lens, and is due out at the end of October. It features the same Prime II image processor as the higher-end K-7. For full details see next week's *News*.

Nikkor milestone

Nikon has made its 50-millionth Nikkor lens since production began in 1959. The first Nikkor lens was the Nikkor-S Auto '5cm f/2'. 'As a brand name for Nikon lenses, Nikkor has become synonymous with high-performance, high-quality SLR lenses,' said a spokesman. 'The Nikkor name comes from adding "R" - a common practice in the naming of photographic lenses at that time - to "Nikko", the Romanised abbreviation for Nippon Kogaku K.K.' Nippon Kogaku K.K. (Japan Optical Co) was formed in 1917.

Lomo store

The Lomographic Society has opened its first store dedicated to selling Lomo products. The shop, located just off London's Carnaby Street, is also designed for Lomo fans to meet and take part in events such as workshops. The Lomography Gallery Store London is located at 3 Newburgh Street, London W1F 7RE. It is open Mon-Sat 10am-7pm, Thurs 10am-9pm and Sun 11am-5pm. Tel: 07866 601 601.

Tamron launches VC-equipped 17-50mm

TAMRON has released a new 17-50mm lens boasting Vibration Compensation (VC) that is designed to reduce the effects of camera shake.

The Tamron SP 17-

50mm f/2.8 XR Di II VC LD Aspherical [IF] lens is designed to be used on Canon and Nikon DSLRs with an APS-C-size imaging sensor.

The 570g lens, which is priced £529.99, is designed to deliver the 35mm viewing angle equivalent of a 26-78mm lens.

Features include a minimum focus distance of 0.29m and macro capability of 1:4.8.

The Canon version is out this month, while the Nikon lens is due out in October.

For details call Intro2020 on 01628 674 411.



WEDNESDAY

23 SEPTEMBER

EXHIBITION A Sense of Place: Photographs by Dan Pearson, until 23 November, at the Garden Museum, London SE1 7LB. Tel: 0207 401 8865. Visit www.gardenmuseum.org.uk. **EXHIBITION** When You're a Boy, until 4 October at The Photographers' Gallery, London W1F 7LW. Tel: 0845 262 1618. Visit www.photonet.org.uk.

THURSDAY

24 SEPTEMBER

EXHIBITION The Who: In the Beginning by Colin Jones, until 15 November at Proud Central, London WC2N 6BP. Tel: 0207 839 4942. Visit www.proud.co.uk. **DON'T MISS** London Fashion Weekend, until 27 September. Visit www.londonfashionweekend.co.uk.



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FRIDAY

25 SEPTEMBER

EXHIBITION Byker Revisited by Finnish photographer Sirkka-Liisa Kontinen, until 31 October, at Side Gallery, 9 Side, Newcastle-upon-Tyne NE1 3JE. Tel: 0191 232 2208. Visit www.amber-online.com. **EXHIBITION** Living with the Wall: Berlin 1961-1989, until 21 March 2010 at Imperial War Museum North, Manchester M17 1TZ. Tel: 0161 836 4000. Visit www.iwm.org.uk.

SATURDAY

26 SEPTEMBER

EXHIBITION The Half: Photographs of Actors by Simon Annand, until 3 January 2010, at The Lowry, Pier 8, Salford Quays, Manchester M50 3AZ. Tel: 0870 787 5793. Visit www.thelowry.com. **EXHIBITION** Poetic Documents 1987-2008, by Stephen Burrows, until 10 November at Southwark Cathedral Refectory, London SE1 9DA. Tel: 07966 158 903. Visit www.stephenburrowsphotography.com.



© SIMON ANNAND

SUNDAY

27 SEPTEMBER

DON'T MISS Regent Street Festival in London celebrates its 10th year and includes a performance by the band Madness. Visit www.regentstreetonline.com. **EXHIBITION** AOP Gallery Print Fair (prints to buy from £46), until 3 October at Association of Photographers, London EC2A 4QS. Tel: 0207 739 6669. Visit www.the-aop.org.

MONDAY

28 SEPTEMBER

EXHIBITION Memories of Summer by Benno Graziani, until 10 October at Hamiltons, London W1K 2EU. Tel: 0207 499 9493. Visit www.hamiltonsgallery.com. **EXHIBITION** The Forgotten Caves and Coves of the Causeway Coast by Andy McInroy (whose work was featured in AP last year), until 3 October at Riverside Theatre, University of Ulster, Coleraine. Tel: 0287 032 3232. Visit www.andymciney.com.

TUESDAY

29 SEPTEMBER

EXHIBITION The East Anglians by Justin Partyka, until 13 December at Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, University of East Anglia, Norwich, Norfolk NR4 7TJ. Tel: 01603 593 199. Visit www.scva.ac.uk. **EXHIBITION** I Want It All, includes images of James Dean, until 10 October at The Little Black Gallery, London SW10 0AJ. Tel: 0207 349 9332. Visit www.thelittleblackgallery.com.

News

Photographers ditch DSLR gear for M9



DEMAND for Leica's M9 camera is outstripping supply, as customers, who included professionals trading in their DSLRs, snapped up the full-frame camera within minutes of Wednesday's launch.

RG Lewis, billed as London's 'oldest Leica shop', confirmed that initial stocks have 'come and gone'. A spokesman said: 'We had eight... and 14 minutes later we didn't.'

'I could sell 50 today,' said managing director Len Lyons, who told us more M9 units were on the way from Leica.

Although most customers are existing fans of the Leica brand, there is evidence that the M9 may be attracting a fresh band of users.

Lyons told us that customers include newspaper photographers switching from their bulky, more pricey top-end DSLR kit to the more compact M9 rangefinder costing £4,850.

'Photographers are getting fed up with carrying around great dollops of cameras... a wedding photographer has just traded in two Canon EOS-1Ds Mark II cameras,' he said.

Clients have also included a man who traded in his Nikon D3 DSLR and lenses – to the great relief of his wife who,



apparently, was glad to be rid of DSLR kit that took up precious space at home.

London-based Leica dealer Richard Caplan said all his initial supplies of the M9 ran out within hours of the launch: 'We have far more orders than we have stock,' he told us.

Caplan said there has, so far, been a 'good mix' of customers, though most are 'established Leica users'. Among them are several professional photographers who have converted to Leica from Nikon as a result of the M9 launch.

Meanwhile, Lyons welcomed the UK availability of the M9 – a contrast to Leica's first digital rangefinder, the M8, which, he said, took Leica a year to supply to him.

Ivor Cooper, director of

City-based Red Dot Cameras, also expressed relief at the immediate availability of the camera: 'This is the first time they [Leica] have had stock and quantity at launch,' he told us.

Ivor said that orders have been 'far greater' than the M8, with 98% of buyers being existing Leica users. 'I have had to turn people away,' he explained.

He added that the majority of clients are 'very keen amateurs and enthusiasts', with most buying the camera body only, and that there is currently about a four-week wait for new orders.

● For details of how you can win a special edition Leica model to celebrate the 125th anniversary of *Amateur Photographer* magazine see AP 10 October.

Technical comment

Damien Demolder
Editor



Barney Britton
Technical writer



One of the obstacles when using a full-frame sensor in an M-series rangefinder in the past has been the issue of corner vignetting. Compared to a DSLR, the exit pupil of a typical M-series lens is very close to the imaging surface, which can lead to unacceptable vignetting, especially with wideangle lenses. Leica claims to have solved this problem by offsetting the microlenses on the M9's sensor towards the edges of the frame. This should increase their light-gathering efficiency, reducing corner shading. The camera is programmed to automatically recognise the 22 lenses in

the M range that are chipped with the six-bit connections. However, for those working with older lenses, and lenses that will be spoiled by having the six-bit chips added, Leica has included a new menu where these lenses can be selected manually. Leica has not yet said how many are in the list, but it is clear that the firm has gone to some lengths to include details of a very wide range of lenses – including differences between upgrades and originals.

● For a photo gallery and video of the M9's features, visit www.amateurphotographer.co.uk



Wideangle Zeiss

Carl Zeiss has unveiled an 18mm f/3.5 lens designed for users of full-frame Canon DSLRs. The Distagon T* optic is hailed as an 'ultra-wideangle' lens capable of delivering a 99° field of view. The EF-mount lens is due out this autumn, costing €1,049, excluding VAT. A UK price had yet to be confirmed at the time of writing.

Legend dies

Tributes have been paid to Willy Ronis, a Frenchman at the forefront of 20th century reportage photography, who has died aged 99. French president Nicolas Sarkozy praised the photographer as a 'chronicler of postwar social aspirations'. A contemporary of Henri Cartier-Bresson, Ronis was given his first camera at the age of 15. For more details, see next week's *News*.

Sony 30mm lens

Sony has confirmed that its long-awaited 30mm f/2.8 SAM Macro digital SLR lens will go on sale in October. The lens was among a batch first announced at the PMA trade show in the US in March.

Leibovitz crisis

Photographer Annie Leibovitz has been given more time to pay off around £15m she owes to lenders, to avoid losing copyright of her images. Leibovitz borrowed the money from New York firm Art Capital using the rights to her photographic archive and the value of her properties as collateral. Art Capital has extended the maturity date of the \$24m loan and dropped its legal action against Leibovitz for breach of contract.

WORLD EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEWS

Samsung halts GX digital SLR plans

Samsung reveals its plans in an interview with **Damien Demolder** at the IFA show in Germany

SAMSUNG will not be introducing a new GX digital SLR camera in the foreseeable future, due to the pressures of researching and manufacturing the new Samsung NX series camera system.

That is the view of Seung Soo-Park, vice-president of the strategy marketing team of Samsung's digital media business.

Speaking during a closed session for UK press at the IFA conference in Berlin, Germany, Park indicated that the company's GX series of DSLRs would be put on hold while the NX series of mirrorless interchangeable lens cameras is developed.

Serious blow

While GX10 and GX20 cameras are still on sale across the world, the shift of concentration would appear to be a serious blow for those who have already invested in the GX series.

Samsung Camera UK MD Robert King added that while the company will continue to support GX users with accessories and repairs, it is



SS Park's comments come a year after Samsung said it wanted to be among the top three DSLR makers

unlikely that any new product will be launched while the NX is in development.

The move echoes that of Panasonic, which has abandoned its SLR business in favour of growing a Micro Four Thirds mirrorless design, although the company's official line is that an L-series full Four Thirds camera cannot be ruled out.

Samsung stated at the launch of the GX10 in September 2006 that it aimed to produce professional-level cameras

and, although still not specifically saying so, Park indicated that the company would remain interested in servicing the sector of the DSLR market not covered by the extended NX series.

Only last year Samsung claimed that, within three years, it would be in the top three for DSLR manufacturers.

NX details

Meanwhile, it appears that Samsung's NX-series cameras will use a lens-based optical stabilisation system, if the dummy models on display at the IFA show were anything to go by.

Lenses fitted to the cameras have one switch for AF/MF while another, marked On/Off, appears to activate a stabilisation system within the optical construction.

However, Park would not confirm the purpose of the

switch. Neither would he confirm that the new range of cameras would use a WiFi and Bluetooth system similar to that used by the company's new ST1000 compact camera.

Meanwhile, in a keynote speech at Samsung's company press conference, Boo-Keun Yoon, president of Samsung electronics, concentrated on the theme of the 'seamless experience' and the wireless home. Park has previously indicated that the Samsung NX cameras will be a 'huge innovation' and that the company's short lead times allow the latest technology to be incorporated.

The Samsung NX was widely expected to be launched at the IFA show, but it has been delayed, probably while the wireless communication systems are perfected.

Park indicated that the GX series of DSLRs would be put on hold while the NX series is developed

Sony hints at Micro Four Thirds-style camera

AP technical writer **Barney Britton** reports from Berlin

SONY is 'very interested' in the Micro Four Thirds interchangeable-lens camera system, according to Ichiro Takagi, deputy president of Sony's Personal Imaging and Sound Division.

Though Takagi suggested that Sony has no plans to join the Four Thirds consortium alongside Olympus and

Panasonic, he accepted that the emergence of Micro Four Thirds has created a new category in consumer digital imaging, between compact digital cameras and DSLRs.

Refusing to be drawn on details of future plans, Takagi said that for now, Sony is concentrating on adding 'unique new features' to its Cybershot and Alpha cameras.

When pressed on whether or not a mirrorless Sony system camera such as the



Takagi would not be drawn on details of such a system. For now, Sony will focus on Alpha and Cybershot

eagerly awaited Samsung NX may be in the offing, he added 'if we do it, we will do it much better'.

Later, in an exclusive

interview with AP, Yann Salmon-Legagneur, Sony's Marketing Manager for Digital Imaging (Europe), said that 'of course' Sony is interested in Micro Four Thirds – 'not the format itself, but the products that [are] being launched'.

Recent Micro Four Thirds cameras from Olympus and Panasonic have 'moved the industry,' he said.

He continued: 'I cannot tell you what will happen in the future, but Sony will probably have a slightly different way of seeing this product'.

Yann concluded, 'I will let you imagine what it might be, but as you know, we are an entertainment company, so maybe our vision will be slightly different, you will have to wait and see.'

Leica's store open for business

LEICA'S first UK store has now opened for business.

Leica Store Mayfair can be found at 34 Bruton Place, London W1 (between Old Bond Street and Berkeley Square).

The shop is situated on the ground floor. The store also houses a photographic studio that will serve to showcase the new Leica S-system.

A training/presentation room incorporates a Leica Pradovit D-1200 projector, audio system and room blackout capability.

The store will be open



Leica Camera Ltd's managing director David Bell (right) with deputy store manager John Murphy at the opening

Monday-Friday 10am-6pm, and 10am-3pm on Saturdays. The training facilities and studio will be open by appointment only.

The store can be contacted on 0207 495 2261.

Leica also has its own stores in Tokyo, Berlin, Paris and Moscow.

DAMIAN DOUGHER

ClubNews

AP's weekly round-up of club news from all over Britain

Clay Cross Photographic Society

The society began its new season on 7 September. Meetings take place on Thursdays, at 7.30pm, at St Mary's Centre, Church Street, Pilsley, Chesterfield S45 8EX. Tel: 01629 56998. Visit www.claycrossps.co.uk.

Beeslack Penicuik Camera Club

Members have kicked off their new season at Beeslack School near Edinburgh. Meetings are held on Thursday evenings from 7.30pm-9pm. New members welcome. The club's exhibition takes place until 26 September at Penicuik Centre Library, Carlos Road, Penicuik EH26 9EP. For library opening hours call 01968 664 050.

Cardigan Photo Club

The club is planning to hold its annual exhibition at Cardigan Guildhall Gallery, High Street, Cardigan, Wales from 15-26 September. A selection of prints (some of which will be available to buy) and projected images will be on show. Visit www.cardiganphotoclub.co.uk.

Send club news to: apevents@ipcmedia.com



Kit show

Enthusiast and professional-level DSLRs will be on show as part of a Nikon Pro and Epson In-Store Day at the London Camera Exchange in Southampton on 23 September. Nikon experts will be on hand to give advice on cameras, including the Nikon D300s, D3000, D5x, D3 and D700. Epson's Stylus A3 and A2 printers will also be demonstrated. Call 0238 033 1720 or visit www.kegroup.co.uk.

Flash gear

Nissin's Di866 Professional Speedlite is now available in the UK. Priced £369.95, the flash is available in Canon and Nikon fits. Features include a guide number of 60 and the ability to upgrade firmware via the built-in USB port. For details call 01793 615836 or visit www.kenro.co.uk.

Samsung compact

Late September will see the release of a new 12-million-pixel compact camera from Samsung. The ST45 sports a 2.7in LCD screen and 11 optimised picture settings, plus a top equivalent ISO sensitivity of 3200.

Images from revamped Hubble



THE first images of space captured by a new 'wide field camera' have been released in what scientists describe as a new era for the 19-year-old Hubble telescope.

'The telescope was given an extreme makeover and now is significantly more powerful than ever, well equipped to last into the next decade,' said a spokesman for NASA.

He said the instruments are more sensitive to light and able to complete observations in a fraction of the time that was needed previously.

The telescope includes two new instruments – the Wide Field Camera 3 and Cosmic Origins Spectrograph.

The camera sees three different kinds of light in the form of near-ultraviolet, visible and near-infrared, and will be used to study dark matter, the formation

of individual stars and the 'discovery of extremely remote galaxies previously beyond Hubble vision'.

Earlier this year astronauts carried out repair work to the camera boards on the Advanced Camera for Surveys (ACS) and Space Telescope Imaging Spectrograph (STIS).

Scientists say they have spent the past three months focusing, testing and calibrating the instruments in preparation for a new phase of observation.

Future plans include surveying the birth of planets outside our solar system and taking 'near-infrared' images to reveal 'never-before-seen' infant galaxies that existed when the universe was less than 500 million years old.

Hubble sits 353 miles above the surface and orbits Earth once every 97 minutes.

NASA



Amateur Photographer

This week in...

1916

AP urged camera clubs to support the idea of a War Emergency Committee, at a time when many younger members were called upon to serve their country. The committee would pay the club's annual subscription and send the receipt made out in the name of the member overseas. 'It can send a parcel of food – dainties if you like – or a parcel of tobacco, warm underclothing,' added AP's 25 September 1916 issue. 'This committee could undertake to send news from the home of the soldier-member, in pictures. How delighted he would be to have news in snapshots from home by his members!' The article added: 'Germany has taught us some things of value – and organisation is one of these.'

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welcome to the Family

190CX 055CX

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March 21st 2009 issue

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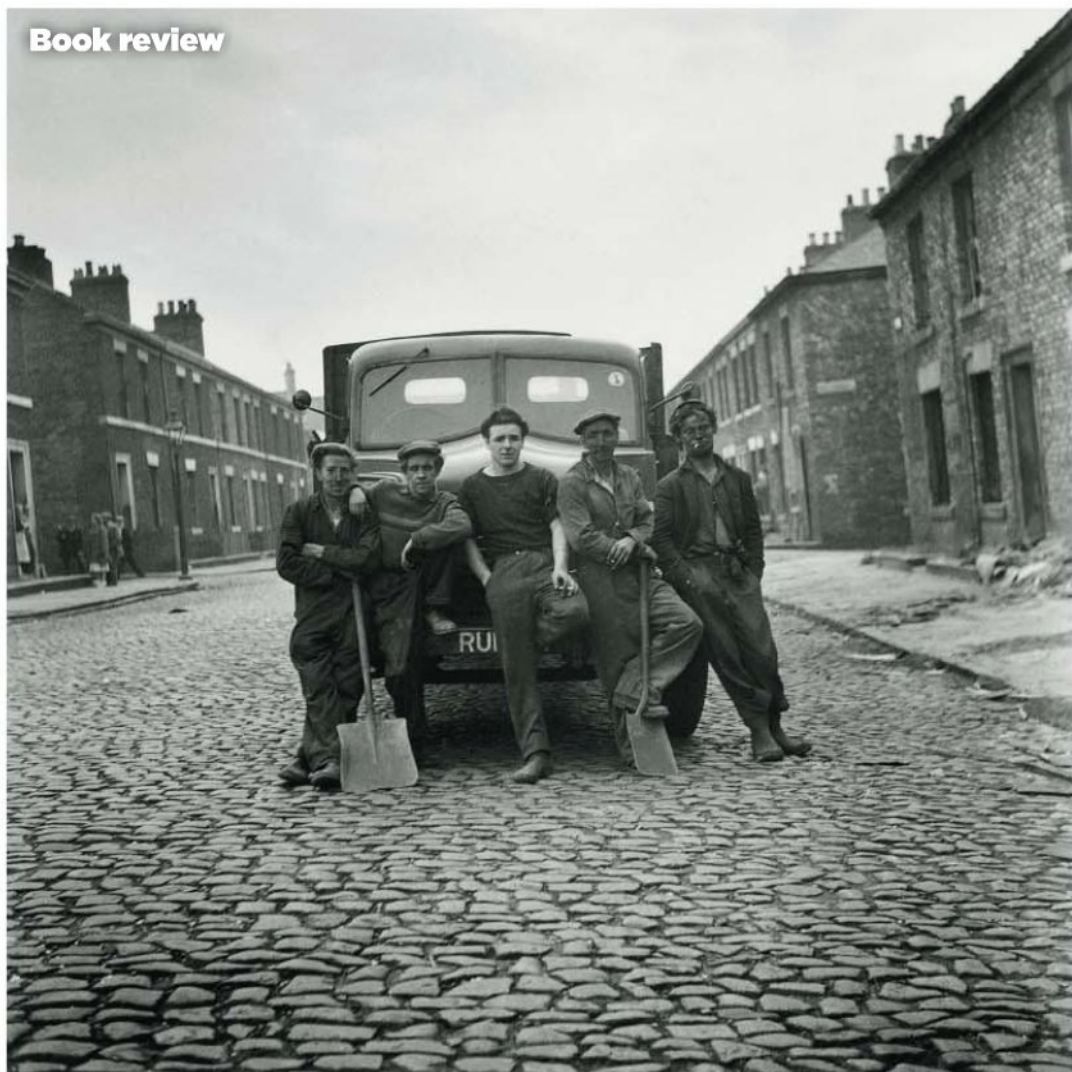


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Review

Your guide to the latest photography books, exhibitions and websites

Book review

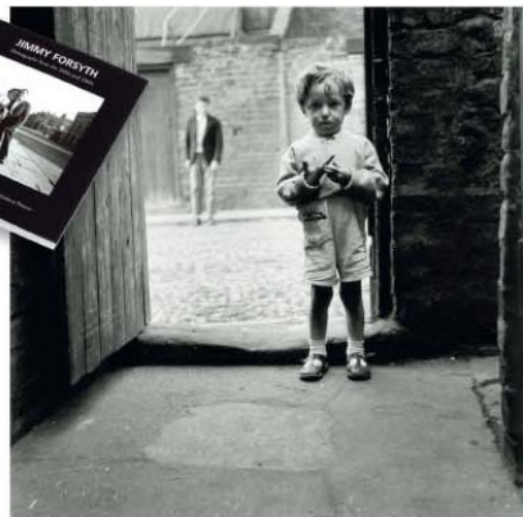


Jimmy Forsyth

Photographs from the 1950s and 1960s

Tyne Bridge Publishing, paperback, 140 pages,
£8.99, ISBN 978-1-857951-33-2

Jimmy Forsyth was a local legend in his adopted Newcastle, having moved there in 1943 in search of work as a fitter. As often happens in life, these plans changed abruptly when an accident at work left him blind in one eye, and what Jimmy found instead was a new career as a documentary photographer. At this time, Newcastle's vibrant working-class community was being torn apart in the name of progress, so in the 1950s, armed with a second-hand box camera, Jimmy began exploring the homes, pubs and back streets of Newcastle aiming to give the city a better sense of identity. He had no formal training as a photographer, and in some pictures this shows, but he did have a great



talent and an apparent rapport with his subjects. Gritty yet intimate, Jimmy's portfolio from this period shines as a perfect record of a time and place lost to history. Sadly, Jimmy died shortly after publication of this book, aged 95 (see *News*, AP 8 August). **Jeff Meyer**





© JIM KRAUSE

Photo Idea Index: Things

By Jim Krause

David & Charles, paperback, 354 pages,
£18.99, ISBN 978-1-60061-044-8

Book review

This clever little book is a breath of fresh air among the claustrophobia of samey technique books on the shelves, but it's really undersold by its title. Following on from Krause's previous book *Photo Idea Index: Places*, the title does give you a general indication of what's inside, but what it doesn't tell you is that this is really a guide to creativity... and there's nothing else like it on the market. Krause spares us the long drawn-out text with tips on filters, bracketing and so on that we've all read hundreds of times. Instead, he provides 19 chapters with vague interpretive titles like 'Shadow World', 'Keeping It Fresh', 'Givers of Light' and 'Water and Stone'. Within each chapter is a series of pictures interpreting this theme in a variety of ways, and at the end he explains his thinking behind each one. It's a wonderful idea for a book and gets the reader thinking beyond the usual subjects and eye-level perspective. Anything that can inspire in this way is certainly worth five stars. **Jeff Meyer**



<http://stevebloomphoto.com>

If you're looking for a photography website to inspire, wildlife photographer and AP expert Steve Bloom's new site is not to be missed. Exciting and interactive, once you start clicking on this recently launched website it will be impossible to stop. On the home page, rolling images provide a taste of what's in store. Along the top are neatly aligned tabs, including Portfolios, Books and Exhibitions. The Portfolios section, divided into People and Animals, showcases documentary images from Steve's trips to Africa and India, plus wildlife images from across the world. The animal portfolio is split into themed categories, including Motion and Conflict, and features a range of animal images from squawking guinea fowl to charging wildebeest. However, the real coup of the site is the embedded videos. Short video interviews and films explaining how Steve approached particular photography projects are featured throughout. You can also keep up to date with Steve's movements through his blog, which provides an insight into his thoughts on photography and his experiences out in the field. This is an excellently constructed website that is engaging and engrossing. **Gemma Padley**



© DANIEL MEADOWS

Exhibition

No Such Thing As Society: Photography in Britain 1967-1987

Until 31 October. National Museum Cardiff, Cathays Park, Cardiff CF10 3NP. Open Tues-Sun 10am-5pm and bank holiday Mondays. Tel: 0292 039 7951. Website: www.museumwales.ac.uk/en/whatson?event_id=3708. Admission free

Class tension, social immobility and widespread unemployment: the late 1960s to the late 1980s was a turbulent time for Britain. As the effects of de-industrialisation and the rise of Thatcherism took hold, the fundamental structure of society was forcibly shaken. Incidents such as the Miners' Strike and the ongoing conflict in Northern Ireland created feelings of unrest, causing people to question what it meant to be part of 'a society'.

This exhibition, which takes its name from Margaret Thatcher's infamous statement, '...society? There is no such thing. There are individual men and women and there are families', features 100 colour and black & white images taken by photographers who experienced the uncertainty and unrest first-hand. Featuring 33 documentary photographers, including Chris Steele-Perkins, Martin Parr and Chris Killip, the exhibition is a collaboration between the British Council and Arts Council Collections. It is divided into six chronological themed sections, including Wastelands (1976-82) featuring images that document the impact of industrial change on communities; and Society in Colour (1984-87), which provides both a bleak and celebratory overview of life in Thatcherite Britain. **Gemma Padley**

Letters

Letter of the week

wins a 20-roll pack of 36-exposure Fujifilm Superia ISO 200 35mm film or a Fujifilm 4GB media card (in a choice of CompactFlash, SD or Memory Stick)*. The sender of every letter published receives a free roll of Fujifilm Superia ISO 200 36-exposure film worth £4.99



FUJIFILM

Nikon canonised

Further to the Canon vs Nikon debate, it appears that Nikon enjoys divine favour, or at least a lobbyist in these matters. This 13th century Byzantine church is dedicated to St Nikon (Ayios means saint in Greek)! I took the picture while on a walk through the countryside of Kythira Island, situated just south of the Peloponnese in Greece.

Mark Brunner, Piraeus, Greece



I knew nothing of leaving generous overlapping between exposures to help the computer or shooting more frames in vertical orientation. As I had never even attempted a stitched panorama before, I am still very thankful I got this result, believe me! – David Clapp

Out in the field

Thank you for your two-part feature on macro photography (Geoffrey Crawley explains..., AP 8 August and AP 12 September); it is a subject that interests me. However, I was surprised to read Geoffrey's statement in part two that 'a long focal length lens has shallow depth of field'.

My understanding of optical physics is that when forming a close-up image of a subject at a chosen size on a sensor, the depth of field depends only on the aperture to focal length ratio of the lens (the f-number), and is independent of the focal length itself. This also applies for distant subjects, except that, particularly with shorter focal length lenses and smaller apertures, the depth of field behind the subject will become greater than the depth of field in front, as the far limit of acceptable sharpness expands towards infinity, while the near limit must remain beyond the sensor. Of course, to achieve the same image size with a longer lens, the camera must be further from the subject.

As Geoffrey states, the focal length will affect the viewing angle, and so out-of-focus background features will appear larger with a longer focal length lens.

Chris Newman, via email

Mr Newman is quite right in the optical theory. Naturally, if an object is imaged at a given size on film or a sensor, then the depth of field will depend only on the focal length and aperture of the lens, assuming the film or sensor format size is maintained pro rata. However, this is

A stitch in time...

In his otherwise excellent article, David Clapp neglected to say which photo-stitching program he uses to create his panoramas (*Photo insight*, AP 12 September). While it can be done in Photoshop, I have found that the free program AutoStitch is excellent. Don't be put off by the designation 'Demo': this is a fully functional, free download program.

Whilst David rightly emphasises the need to get the mechanics right, I have found that AutoStitch will handle just about everything 'as taken'. Obviously, you can help the program by getting uniform exposures, fixed white balance, by minimising vignetting and so on, yet AutoStitch doesn't seem to object at all to these problems. The only limitation is that moving objects or people can appear twice, and wind-blown foliage can cause problems. Moving clouds can

be tricky, as in any panorama. One way to minimise these problems is to create a two-picture panorama and then add the extra photos to build up the final result. Normally, AutoStitch uses your first picture as master, but this can itself be a panorama.

I made up a panorama from two sets of seven photos, one taken with a DSLR and the other with a pocket compact. I made no attempt to match exposures or focal lengths, but AutoStitch coped well with only one small area where there was a little obvious discontinuity.

R J Maddison, Dorset

I used Photomerge in Photoshop CS. It was extremely basic and left the initial composite image with errors that had to be fixed manually, which wasn't helped in the slightest by my lack of panorama skills, equipment or stitching knowledge.



What The Duck



Write to Letters, Amateur Photographer, IPC Media, Blue Fin Building, 110 Southwark Street, London SE1 0SU
fax to 020 3148 8130 or email to amateurphotographer@ipcmedia.com

* Please indicate whether you would like to receive Fujifilm film or a memory card (please state type preferred) and include your full postal address

AP reader **Barry Beattie** rails against what he sees as hypocrisy at the BBC

Start them young

I took this shot of my son reading your magazine. I thought you might like it.
Rick Wilks, via email



not how we work in practice. A lens that has a long focal length for a given format will isolate a significant part of the subject area by imaging it larger in the format in use. Under that condition, as we all know, depth of field will be shallow. Also, if we were to enlarge a section of the frame taken with a shorter focal length lens to the same size, image quality would be lower and grain or noise would be likely to become evident – **Geoffrey Crawley, photo-science consultant**

End of the road?

I understand that Fujifilm has ceased production of Acros monochrome film in its QuickLoad series. Is this the beginning of the end for all QuickLoad film stock, and so the demise of the system? I have not read any such report in AP, so any information would be gratefully received.
Geoff Leah, Denbighshire

Fujifilm has told me that it has indeed discontinued its Acros Black & White 4x5in QuickLoad film. However, the firm says it has no plans to discontinue the 4x5in QuickLoad film format. Jerry Deeney, marketing manager for Professional Film & Motion Picture Film at Fujifilm UK, writes: 'Although Acros Black & White 4x5in QuickLoad film has been discontinued in the UK, the QuickLoad film format still remains very popular for our range of colour negative and colour transparency films. In addition to the 4x5in QuickLoad film format, Fujifilm UK has just released the new PA-45 4x5in Instant Film Holder for use with FP100C and FP100B

4x5in Instant Films' – Chris Cheesman, news editor

The strife of Bryan

AP is right to say that getting permission from a venue to take concert shots is imperative (AP explains... *Performance photography*, AP 5 September). I went to a Bryan Adams gig a few years ago, and prior to the concert I rang to see if photography was allowed.

A friendly voice assured me that as one of the fans who'd helped Bryan to the top, I was 'welcome' to take photos. When I asked to whom I was speaking I was told 'just one of Bryan's guys'. That was good enough for me – or so I thought.

I sat in the front row of the upstairs balcony and got out my Pentax LX and zoom lens. By kneeling down I was able to rest my camera on the balcony handrail, which meant no hassle from people behind me. I'd taken just three shots when a security guard appeared and yanked my camera from me. Concerned about possible damage to the camera I hurried after him, and soon found myself with a filmless camera standing outside in the rain. My pleas that I had permission to take pictures cut no ice, and the hostility of the guard was scary. My wife, who'd been sitting next to me, came out concerned for my safety. The end result was that we missed a concert we'd been looking forward to for months.

Whether it really was one of 'Bryan's guys' I spoke to I'll never know. My wife joked that it might even have been the bloke who cleans the toilets. Come to think of it, his Canadian accent did sound a bit naff.

Mike Bowman, Tyne and Wear

THE BBC *Newsnight* programme on Thursday 30 July presented a well-researched feature on the way Eastern European workers are being exploited by London's top hotels, paying them less than the minimum wage for cleaning guest rooms. To my surprise, it was followed by an announcement that a major feature on Woolworths was planned, asking viewers to take pictures of their local closed-down Woolworths stores and send them in to the BBC.

However, rather like the example of the hotel cleaning workers mentioned above, if you send in your pictures to the BBC do not expect a minimum fee: you won't get paid at all!

A glance at the 'Terms and Conditions' on the *Newsnight* website reveals that, by contributing photographic material, 'You agree to grant the BBC, free of charge, permission to use the material in any way it wants'. Furthermore, the BBC 'may share your contributions with trusted third parties'. This is 'legal speak' for syndicating your pictures, which are your copyright, around the worldwide media without any recompense to you. It says it might credit your name to the picture – oh, big deal!

Payment upon use of material is one of those old technology traditions the BBC would rather you forgot about

The BBC has been operating this scam for some time. It makes regular appeals on its news bulletins for viewers to 'send us your news pictures' of everything from floods to the Notting Hill Carnival. In earlier times, the corporation would have had to pay a professional stills

photographer for such services, but in these days of digital imaging, it seems happy to use even material of questionable quality, so long as it's free. It is one of the downsides of new technology that easy transmission of photographs allows giant organisations like the BBC to exploit gullible photographers. Payment upon use of material is one of those old technology traditions the BBC would rather you forgot about.

The old excuses the BBC makes about being 'cash-strapped' and a 'non-profit organisation' have begun to look distinctly hollow of late, particularly after recent revelations in *The Daily Telegraph* concerning the lavish lifestyle of their executives: £500 meals at luxury restaurants; charging mooring fees for their yachts at the Cannes Film Festival to expenses. It's nice to know exactly what your (rising) annual licence fee is going towards, isn't it? I haven't even mentioned the £6m salary of a certain TV host!

Perhaps readers who have contributed pictures to the BBC for free in the past, mistakenly thinking that getting their picture on the telly gives them some kind of 'kudos', will think before doing so again in the future.

Your thoughts or views (about 500 words) should be sent to 'Backchat' at the usual AP address (see page 3). A fee of £50 will be paid on publication

Photo Insight

Amateur
Photographer
Technique

WHEN **TOM MACKIE** SPOTTED THIS BRIGHTLY COLOURED BUILDING IN ARIZONA IN THE UNITED STATES, HE KNEW THERE WAS AN IMAGE TO BE HAD. TOM EXPLAINS HOW HE BALANCED LIGHT, COLOUR AND SHAPE TO CRAFT THIS GRAPHIC COMPOSITION

FINDING this scene was a pure fluke. I had been photographing the City Hall, a Spanish-style domed building in the middle of Tucson, Arizona, and out of the corner of my eye I saw a flash of colour. With my interest piqued, I thought I'd go and investigate.

I stumbled across this business complex called La Placita that was built in the traditional Adobe style (made from sand and clay) and painted with these bright colours. It was incredible. I started wandering around, looking for interesting details and paying particular attention to the way the light was hitting the building.

I found this unassuming stairwell and started taking some pictures. What attracted me to the scene was the light streaming through the stairs, bouncing off the wall and creating these striking diagonal lines. The intersecting geometric shapes also caught my eye. The light hadn't come down as far as it has in the final picture, although the elongated light shafts were already there. I waited a little for the light to move round so the shadows were further down the wall. It is the lines that make this image – they are going in the same direction as the railing and stairs, which creates balance.

I positioned my tripod and Pentax 67 camera with a 75mm shift lens directly in front of the stairs, but the

The AP experts

Each week, one of our team of experts of Steve Bloom, David Clapp, Tom Mackie and Clive Nichols will reveal the secrets behind one of their great images. This week it's Tom Mackie

TOM MACKIE Architecture
As an internationally respected architectural photographer, Tom brings a wealth of experience to AP



composition didn't work. The shot looked straight through the stairs and out of the picture. The diagonal light shafts did not have as much impact and there were bins in the bottom of the frame.

Thinking about how to frame your subject is crucial. The strength of a composition like this comes from creating a frame within a frame. People tend to think of framing as using a tree branch or a window, but a frame can be more subliminal than that. In this image, the strong vertical bands of colour keep your eye firmly fixed on the centre.

I shifted my tripod to the side and

positioned my camera to include the strong colours on both sides of the image. I was eager to capture those powerful triangular shapes along the side of the staircase. I like concentrating on details to create smaller compositions within the overall image because I think it creates impact. When you look at this image you can see rectangles, triangles and diagonals, all working together to create a unified composition.

For me, deciding how to balance colour and shape in the frame happens simultaneously. If I had excluded the band of colour on the right-hand side, for example, it

wouldn't have had the same sense of balance. If you cover the purple and cyan strip you can see this.

Using the shift lens meant I could ensure the verticals were straight. I was too close to use a telephoto lens, and a wideangle optic would have caused distortion. The 75mm lens keeps everything in proportion. It's a case of knowing which lens will work best for the composition you're trying to create. On a standard DSLR with a 24–105mm zoom lens, you would probably want to shoot a scene like this at approximately 50mm or 55mm. If you get converging verticals, you can always





BOTH PICTURES © TOM MACKIE



Talking technique

The picture above shows the same building, but compositionally the image is not as strong. When you look at this image you notice the strong shape of the cut-off window and your eye is also drawn to the white line in the centre, which doesn't lead anywhere specific. The other diagonals also lead out of the frame.

Understanding how certain colours work together in an image is key to creating a successful end result. A colour wheel will help you to judge this, and one can be found as part of *Photo Insight* in AP 18 April. Yellows and blues complement each other and create a really punchy image, but it is important to think about the balance of light and dark colours in the frame – dark colours recede while lighter colours jump out more readily. You have to decide how to crop the image so there is an equal balance between the two.

Pitting purple against a blue sky didn't create as strong a combination here because there isn't enough contrast. There is a lot of dark colour close together and although there is a bright yellow strip on the right-hand side, the composition doesn't hang together as harmoniously as the main image.

straighten them up in Photoshop (Edit>Transform>Perspective).

I took this image at around 1–2pm. I often photograph architecture at 10am or mid-afternoon to get a good quality of light and saturated colour. With architectural work, you can create really striking images during the day, but the light has to complement the building you're photographing. When photographing sections of a building, later in the day when the sun is higher in the sky tends to be best.

I was using a small aperture of around f/22 and a shutter speed of 1/2sec. I was quite close to the cyan and purple wall, so I wanted to get this

It is better to be slightly overexposed for a scene like this as the colours will 'pop' out of the frame

fairly sharp. I took spotmeter readings from the purple and pink walls, and the shadowy darker orange area in the background. I did not take a reading from the diagonal lines of light, as this would have thrown my exposure out.

There was a difference of four to five stops between the readings for the darkest areas and the lighter areas in the foreground, so I made sure the shadows were correctly exposed. I bracketed my exposures because sometimes you get an overexposed frame that is actually very useful. It is better to be slightly overexposed than underexposed for a scene like this because the colours will 'pop' out of the frame. An underexposed image would look muddy. If you were shooting this on a DSLR and hadn't blown your highlights you could recover detail in the raw file by bringing the exposure down in post-

processing. I used Fujichrome Velvia 50 film, which helped bring out the strong, saturated colours.

A lot of people look at an image like this and say, 'I don't get it. Why would you want to take a picture of that?' It's not an obvious choice of subject, but the little intimate details often reveal more about the building than a photograph of the whole structure. I've tried to achieve something that is personal to me. If you create images you are happy with, that, ultimately, is what counts. **AP**

To see more images by Tom Mackie visit www.tommackie.com

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Insider knowledge



Amateur Photographer's guide to Britain's best photo locations. This week... **Westonbirt Arboretum**

Sarah Howard



Age 33
Favourite photographers
Ansel Adams,
Robert Doisneau
and Charlie Waite

Favourite locations The Lake District and Tuscany in Italy

Photographic approach 'I believe a location should be visited and observed in all weathers and light. With this comes the ability to produce a good image'

COMPRISING some 18,000 trees and shrubs over approximately 600 acres (2.4km²), Westonbirt Arboretum is a visually arresting area of woodland on the outskirts of Tetbury, Gloucestershire, and one of the more popular arboreta in the UK. Thousands of visitors traverse its 17 miles (27km) of marked paths, which offer access to a wide variety of rare foliage, and the arboretum has the potential for photographers to make stunning images all year round.

Sarah Howard has been visiting the arboretum for years, exploring the vast avenues of birch, maple and other trees that make up Westonbirt's constantly changing canvas of colour. Such is her knowledge of and love for the arboretum that Sarah has released a book documenting the forest through the seasons, called *A Year in the Life of Westonbirt*. This month in *Insider Knowledge* she shares her favourite images from Westonbirt, and reveals some of her tips for composition and capturing dramatic pictures.



Betula ermanii Fujifilm FinePix S5 Pro, 28-105mm 1sec at f/16, ISO 100



This picture of an Asian birch tree is one of my favourite images. I fell in love with this tree, and if I could pick one tree in the whole arboretum to photograph it would be this one. It is grand, magnificent and has so much character. The way its branches reach out and the texture of its peeling bark seem to command your attention. Normally I would try to include the

top of the tree in my composition, but in this case I didn't want to capture the canopy. I wanted to focus on the branches and the forest floor where there's beautiful light. There are a huge number of these trees in the arboretum, and if you catch the late afternoon light in autumn you can create a very powerful image. This was taken late in the day, and you can see there was a very warm light bathing the whole scene.

NEED TO KNOW...

How to get there

Westonbirt, The National Arboretum, is situated in Gloucestershire on the A433 approximately three miles south-west of Tetbury. Look out for the brown signs. The address is Westonbirt, The National Arboretum, Tetbury, Gloucestershire GL8 8QS. Tel: 01666 880 220. Website: www.forestry.gov.uk/westonbirt. By car from the M4: exit at Junction 18. Take the A46 north, then turn onto the A433 (signposted Cirencester). From the M5: exit at Junction 13 onto the A419 (towards Stroud). Take the A46 (towards Bath). Turn onto the A4135 to Tetbury, then right onto the A433.

Admission

2 January-28 February: adult £5, concession £4, child £2 (under 5s free). 1 March-31 September: adult £7, concession £6, child £2 (under 5s free). 1 October-30 November: adult £8, concession £7, child £3 (under 5s free). 1 December-31 December: car-parking charge only, £5 per car 9am-4pm.

Opening times

Open: Mon-Fri 9am, Sat-Sun 8am. Close: Dec-March 5pm or dusk if earlier; Apr-Nov 8pm or dusk if earlier.

Where to stay

The only hotel within walking distance is the Hare & Hounds Hotel. A basic campsite is located at the Holford Arms (about 10 minutes' drive), and there are B&Bs in nearby Cotswold towns.

Where to eat

There is a choice of places to eat on-site, including The Maples Restaurant, The Courtyard Café and a picnic area.

Workshops

Sarah will be hosting workshops at Westonbirt Arboretum on 25 October, 1 November and 7 November 2009. For more information visit www.imageseen.co.uk.

Reader offer

AP readers may buy Sarah's book, *A Year in the Life of Westonbirt*, for £13.59 inc UK p&p (RRP £16.99) by calling Bookpoint on 01235 827 702 and quoting the reference '46YWAP'. Offer expires 31 January 2010.

The Downs

Fujifilm FinePix S5 Pro,
28-105mm, 2secs at f/22, ISO 100



I took this shot earlier this year when we had a few frosty days. I'd been tracking this spot within the arboretum all year long because I really loved the line of trees and the symmetry the trees created. I was drawn to the formation of the trees in twos and the bands of colour. Over the changing seasons there was quite a transformation in their appearance, and the dense frost covering the trees that morning looked magical. We don't get a lot of hard frost in this country, so it was a real treat to find.

I composed the picture with a panoramic image in mind because I wanted the focus to be on the long row of trees in the middle rather than the trees in the background. The sky was quite dull that day, so I decided there was no point including it. My aim was to show the trees within their setting. I took three images of the scene, overlapping on the third, and stitched them together in Photoshop to create a bigger file size that can be reproduced large.

Fern in the breeze

Fujifilm FinePix S5 Pro,
28-105mm, 1/13sec at f/10, ISO 100



I like to take close-up photographs of smaller plants as well as trees at the arboretum. This was a group of ferns that drew me in with their texture and shape. It was a bit different from what other people were shooting, and I spent some time taking several exposures. Some were sharp, but I like this softer image because it gives a different feel to the subject. I used a polariser to bring out the green, which was really rich already. Deciding what focal length would look best was tricky and ended up being a matter of trial and error. When I shoot general views I tend to use the hyperfocal focusing technique, but for macro subjects I try different focus points to see what looks best. I probably tried seven or eight versions before settling on this one. I like how the fern leads the eye from the lower left up to the top right of the frame.

Carpet of colour

Fujifilm FinePix S5 Pro,
28-105mm, 2secs at f/22, ISO 400



In the autumn you look up all the time, but if you glance down once in a while you will often find stunning patterns of colour at your feet. Here I was attracted to the bands of colour on the forest floor. I like how the red leads you through to the yellow, then back to red and to the tree itself, giving the image depth. Because I wanted the focus to be on the floor rather than on the tree itself, I gave myself a lot of foreground, so the picture needed extensive depth of field. You're generally supposed to photograph autumn leaves when there's no wind, but sometimes a bit of motion blur can produce a nice effect, particularly when you have falling leaves. I decided to show the movement of the leaves on the tree with my long exposure, which I feel helps relate them to the leaves on the floor.

Insider knowledge
Did you know...
The arboretum was established in 1829 by Robert Stayner Holford

Morning rays

Fujifilm FinePix S5 Pro,
28-105mm, 1/2sec at f/16



This was taken as sun was rising. The scene looked so magical. I was in a little clearing and rays were coming down through the canopy overhead, illuminating the tree and giving soft, diffused atmospheric light. Clearings are some of the best places to find dramatic pictures because the strong rays of light are more obvious. It's also nice to isolate one tree. The tendency is to frame everything in one image when faced with a host of beautiful scenery, but the simplicity of letting one tree have its say can often provide a more striking result.

To get the rays so crisp and defined I had to underexpose, which also preserved the highlights in the sky. I also bracketed in thirds and underexposed by about a stop.

Ivy on bark

Fujifilm FinePix S5 Pro,
28-105mm, 1sec at f/14, ISO 100



It often rains at Westonbirt, and when it does I look around the arboretum for detail shots. Bark on the trees makes a great subject to shoot during the rain. There are often nice patterns and textures to be captured, and working closer in the even light works to your advantage.

Yet while bark on its own has interesting texture, I like to look for extra details. Without the ivy this image would be pretty boring, but with the ivy it creates a beautiful pattern. The colours complement each other well and the leaves are heart-shaped. I cropped this to a square because I thought it worked better and there was a smaller ivy plant in the frame that didn't look quite right. The square here gives you the same amount of space on either side, and the subjects fit well.

Insider knowledge
The arboretum hosted Britain's first designer-led garden festival called Festival of the Garden

Lime Avenue

Fujifilm FinePix S5 Pro, 70-300mm
at 70mm, blend of 8 exposures, f/22



I love this tranquil area of the arboretum. To help convey what I was feeling here, I wanted to capture a little movement in the leaves. To do this I realised I needed to take a multiple exposure, which is pretty easy with my camera as it has a multiple exposure function. After taking meter readings from the light and dark areas of the scene, I took eight pictures and blended them together. The effect is kind of painterly. I tried another version of this without the multiple exposure, but it wasn't as good. The colours weren't as strong and it was a bit flat.

This is a summer shot, which is the best time of year to shoot this line of trees. In autumn the foliage turns yellow and the growth at the bottom of the trunks disappears. Although summer is often not the best time to photograph trees because everything is green and it's hard to find variety, this is the exception to that rule.

Do you have intimate knowledge of a great photo location?

Share it with your fellow readers, see your work in print and earn yourself £100 in the process. Submit a collection of at least ten images (JPEG or TIFF) with a brief explanation of where the location is and what is special about it. We'll call to interview you about the details, so you don't have to write anything, but make sure the pictures are centred around one place. We are looking for the inside track on well-known as well as new locations anywhere in the UK, the best subjects to focus on and the best angles, weather conditions and times of day. Send a CD/DVD in the first instance to 'Inside Knowledge' at the address shown on page 3. See www.amateurphotographer.co.uk/knowledge for more info.

ALL PHOTOS: SARAH HOWARD





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Cars in close-up

AP reader **David Handley** explains how he uses bright colours, bold shooting angles and unconventional cropping to create his vivid images of classic cars. He talks to **Gemma Padley**

WE'RE used to seeing cars all around us: indeed, many of us own a car of some description. But what would we see if we looked at cars with fresh eyes from angles we had never considered before? Amateur photographer David Handley is well practised at viewing vehicles from unconventional stances. For the past five years he has been travelling to car shows in the north-west of England, photographing the huge selection of classic cars on display. 'I've always loved cars and enjoy flicking through car magazines looking at the striking photographs,' he says. 'I try to emulate that dynamic look in my own images.'

When he is at a show and a car catches his eye, David, who lives in Wrexham, North Wales, wanders around his subject to work out the best shooting angle, experimenting with different focal

lengths as he goes. His choice of focal length depends on the position of the car. 'If there is enough room around the subject and not too much clutter in the background I will use a shorter focal length, but if there is a lot of distracting elements I will zoom in,' he says. 'It is sometimes tricky to avoid including people in the frame, but getting to a show early or asking people politely if they would mind moving are ways around this problem.'

The process of deciding on a suitable shooting angle is central to David's distinctive-looking compositions. Rather than standing back and including the whole car in the frame, he gets in close and selects only sections of the vehicles to photograph, always shooting handheld for ease of movement. 'The cars are lined up in rows and there is enough room to move in between them, but they are often tightly



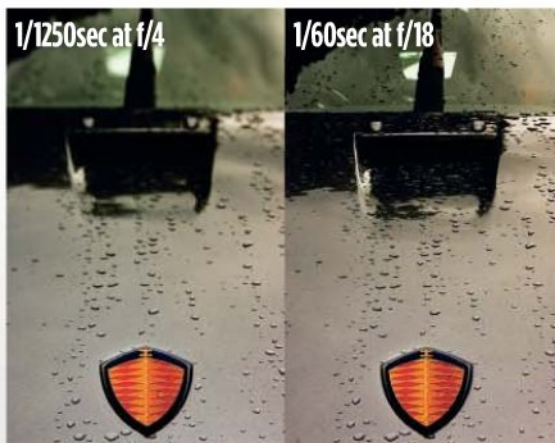
Porsche badge
Canon EOS
300D, 18-50mm,
1/50sec at f/20,
ISO 100

Depth of field

David uses aperture priority to allow him to vary his depth of field. He generally chooses a medium aperture of f/5.6 or f/8, although he will stop down to f/11 or further depending on how much of the image he wants in focus. There is no 'set' aperture that David uses for his car images, and his decision on what aperture will work best with a subject varies as he walks around the vehicle.

The two images here clearly illustrate the effect of aperture control. For the image on the left, David used an aperture of f/4, while the other image was taken at f/18. In the first image, the blurred background focuses attention on the bright orange crest at the bottom of

the frame. The larger depth of field in the right-hand image allows us to see right to the top of the frame and everything is in focus, even the less important parts of the scene. This, however, makes it less clear what we should be focusing on because the bottom and top halves of the frame vie for our attention.



Right: Ford Consul
Canon EOS 300D, 18-50mm, 1/640sec at f/7.1, ISO 100

packed together so it is difficult to create a "clean" image of a whole car,' he says. 'I'm attracted by the interaction of shape and colour, and I try to create impact by focusing on the small details instead, such as the shape of a wing mirror, interesting lights or a reflection in a wheel, or anything that will give my composition a graphic feel. It is a case of having an open mind and seeing what can be achieved,' he continues. 'If there is nothing in the composition that holds the eye or captures the imagination, there is no point taking the image.'

Below: This shot of a Ford was taken at a custom-car show in Towyn, North Wales
Canon EOS 300D, 18-50mm, 1/400sec at f/9, ISO 100

Using either a Canon EOS 300D or EOS 30D camera with a 18-50mm zoom lens, David typically gets down low and positions his camera looking up at the car so it is looming large in the frame. Sometimes he photographs his subject head-on for maximum impact. David tries to find angles that allow him to accentuate the sleek running lines of the car frame and make the car look three-dimensional. 'I like clean backgrounds and am drawn to curves and flowing lines,' he says. 'If I photographed the car side-on, I wouldn't be able to capture these aspects in the way that I can when I'm shooting at an angle to the headlights, for example – the images wouldn't have





the same sense of depth or perspective. Crouching or lying down may result in some funny looks, but I'd rather do this than come away wishing I'd given something a go.'

Colour is a major component in David's images and his compositions often feature bold blocks of colour that are juxtaposed. 'If you can include a bright blue sky in the frame, it provides a punchy background for the car,' he says. 'For example, yellow works well against the blue sky because the colours complement each other. The colours are captured in-camera, but during post-processing I occasionally experiment with different white balance settings with my raw file to see which is closest to how the scene looked to me at the time.'

When shooting, David monitors his camera's histogram to ensure his image is correctly exposed and brackets his exposures if he needs to. The surfaces of the car bodies are often highly reflective, so David makes sure he positions his camera to avoid any extreme bright areas that might cause his camera to overexpose. If parts of the image are overexposed, David adjusts the exposure afterwards using the Highlight slider in Capture One 4 raw-conversion software.

David intends to continue photographing at car shows, although he has recently started to photograph abandoned vehicles using the same compositional approach. 'I'm looking forward to seeing what other unusual compositions I can create by working in this way,' he says. **AP**

Rectifying faults

'This image of an American Chevrolet car photographed head-on is a straightforward shot,' says David, 'but as you can see it has two "faults". In the original image, part of an awning is visible to the left of the car and this draws unwanted attention. I cloned this out in Photoshop Elements using a medium-sized Clone brush, working down to a two or three-pixel brush to ensure a clean edge. The car is also not quite level, so I corrected this using a LensDoc plug-in filter. I opened the file in the LensDoc plug-in and selected the Fix Rotation option. After re-opening the file in Photoshop Elements, I brightened the image slightly (Layer>New Adjustment Layer>Levels) and

increased the saturation of the overall image, but I wasn't happy with the results. The shot seemed to lack interest so I used a black & white plug-in filter called B/W Styler to convert the image to black & white. This is a useful plug-in for creating interesting black & white effects, and is compatible with many types of software, including Photoshop and Photoshop Elements. After converting my image to black & white, I used the Colour Mask facility within B/W Styler to retain the red of the Chevrolet wording while I added a red tone to the overall image. Finally, I selected the Chevrolet wording using the Lasso tool in Photoshop Elements and increased the saturation to make the text more prominent.'



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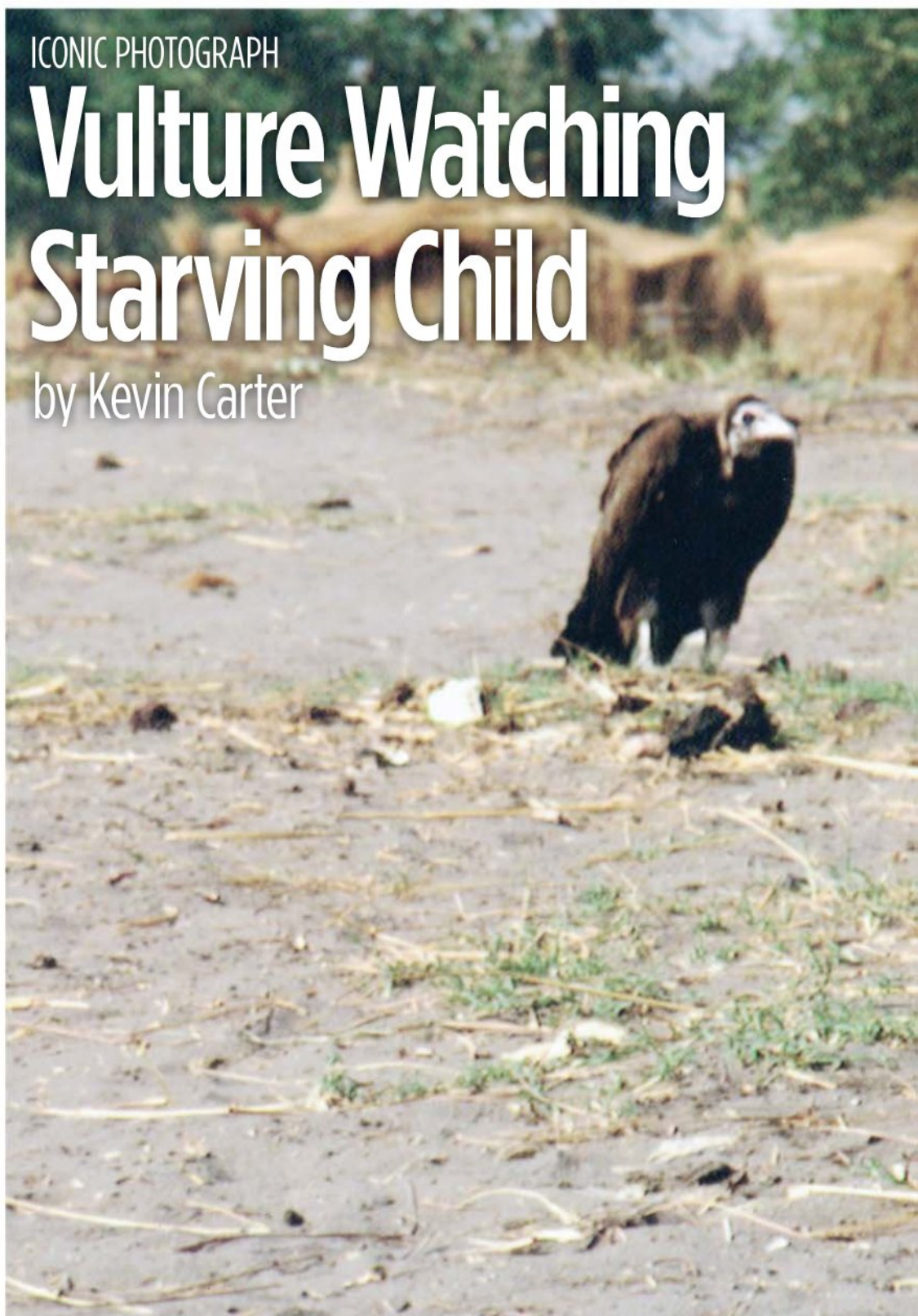
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ICONIC PHOTOGRAPH

Vulture Watching Starving Child

by Kevin Carter



“Overcome and hollowed by hunger, Carter saw an emaciated young girl collapse with exhaustion. Behind her, a vulture landed and watched in anticipation”



Kevin Carter's dramatic image of a vulture watching over a young Sudanese girl collapsed from hunger both shocked and enthralled the world. **Jeff Meyer** explains how the horrors of what he saw, and mounting personal problems, ultimately led Carter to take his own life

Kevin Carter took this iconic image during a 30-minute stopover in southern Sudan. A colleague said that afterwards he was depressed and 'talked to God in between sobs and tears'



© KEVIN CARTER / KEVIN CARTER TRUST / SPINAUTOPICS

IN early March 1993, a United Nations jet flying under the banner of its Operation Lifeline Sudan initiative, touched down in the parched famine belts of southern Sudan. Kevin Carter, a veteran photographer of the power struggles in his native South Africa, took leave from his day job and borrowed money to join this

UN flight so he could document the rebel movement in Sudan.

During a stopover of 30 minutes while the UN delegation distributed food, Carter and fellow South African photojournalist Joao Silva disembarked to have a wander around. Intent on photographing local guerrilla fighters, Silva hurried into

the nearby village. Carter, however, stayed near the plane. Years covering conflict and suffering had taken their toll on him, and the solace he sought in the camaraderie of his fellow photographers, as well as dagga, the locally grown marijuana plants, seemed to help him get by. Silva recalls, however, that this was Carter's

first time in a famine situation, and he wore his shock across his face.

Nevertheless, Carter carried on with his job. As parents queued to collect rations of food, their children lingered behind. The children interested Carter, and he began photographing them as they lined up on





A young famine victim in a feeding centre, southern Sudan. Carter's inability to distance himself from the horror that he saw eventually led to him committing suicide

© KEVIN CARTER/MEAN PATRICK/CARTER TRUST/STONACORBIS

the outskirts, looking on in desperation. He took a series of pictures, but eventually the scene became too overwhelming and he walked off. It was then that a faint whimpering caught his attention. Overcome and hounded by hunger, Carter saw an emaciated young girl collapse with exhaustion. Behind her, a vulture landed and watched in anticipation.

Instinctively, Carter crept slowly forward until he was just ten metres away, and both the girl and vulture were in focus. He waited 20 minutes for the vulture to spread its wings, but when it refused Carter took the picture. He took more, and the vulture eventually flew away. Carter then found a place to sit, where he lit a cigarette and talked to God in between sobs and tears. 'He was depressed afterwards,' Silva recalls. 'He kept saying he wanted to hug his daughter.'

Carter didn't know it yet, but the reluctant journalist had taken what has become one of the most lauded and heavily criticised images of all time. On 26 March, his picture first appeared in print in *The New York Times*, and thousands of enquiries into the fate of the young girl followed. Public interest prompted a special editor's note explaining that the young girl pulled herself up and walked away, but her ultimate fate remained unknown.

Meanwhile, the image was reproduced around the world and became an icon for Africa's plight. Colleagues and acquaintances phoned Carter one by one and congratulated him on his work. Buoyed by newfound fame, he quit his day job and signed

The image was reproduced around the world and became an icon for Africa's plight

on with Reuters as a freelancer with a guaranteed \$2,000 a month. A year later he won the coveted Pulitzer Prize for feature photography. Carter wrote to his parents in Johannesburg: 'I swear I got the most applause of anybody... I can't wait to show you the trophy. It is the most precious thing, and the highest acknowledgment of my work I could receive.'

Yet with success came scorn. Mixed between allegations of faking the scene were more serious accusations of journalistic irresponsibility. 'The man adjusting his lens to take just the right frame of her suffering might just as well be a predator, another vulture on the scene,' opined Florida's *St Petersburg Times* in a scathing editorial. Even friends questioned Carter's lack of response to the girl's obvious peril.

Carter had long been a troubled soul known for the tumultuousness of his moods, and when the number of criticisms began matching his successes it only served to feed his constant self-doubt. Carter suffered under the pressure. He struggled with drug abuse and a string of failed relationships, as well as professional errors that left him worrying about his financial security. On top of his

constant visions of death, the impact of his iconic image consumed him, and those close to him recall how he withdrew in the months after his image was published. 'Kevin always carried around the horror of the work he did,' his father said, and it was partly his inability to distance himself from the horror he saw that led to Carter taking his own life.

On 27 July 1994, just months after he won a Pulitzer, the 33-year-old Carter drove his pick-up truck into the suburbs of Johannesburg and parked it against a gum tree near where he often played as a small boy. With silver gaffer tape, he attached a garden hose to his exhaust pipe and ran the other end through the passenger-side window. The note on the passenger seat read, 'I'm really, really sorry. The pain of life overrides the joy to the point that joy does not exist.' **AP**



Book & Film

The Boy who Became a Postcard, by Akio Fujiwara, recounts Joao Silva's memories of his and Carter's excursion to Sudan.

The Death of Kevin Carter: Casualty of the Bang Bang Club, aka *The Life of Kevin Carter*, is a 2005 Academy Award-nominated documentary by Dan Krauss about the suicide of South African photojournalist Kevin Carter.

Events of 1993

March Authorities announce the capture of suspected World Trade Center bombing conspirator Mohammad Salameh

April The World Wide Web is born at CERN

May A Tamil Tigers suicide bomber assassinates President Ranasinghe Premadasa of Sri Lanka

June US President Bill Clinton orders a cruise missile attack on Iraqi intelligence headquarters in response to the attempted assassination of former US President George H W Bush during his visit to Kuwait in mid-April

July UN inspection teams leave Iraq. Iraq then agrees to UNSCOM demands and the inspection teams return

Aug For the first time, the public is allowed inside Buckingham Palace

Sept Russian troops withdraw from Poland and a coalition of the Democratic Left Alliance and the Polish People's Party comes to power

Oct China performs a nuclear test, ending a worldwide de facto moratorium

Nov The Maastricht Treaty takes effect, formally establishing the European Union

Dec The interim South African constitution is approved by Parliament 237-45



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1 David Meredith Warwickshire 37pts

Sony Alpha 700, 105mm, 3.2secs at f/25, ISO 200

David was looking on photo websites when he saw a similar picture to his winning image and thought he could do it better. With only window light behind him, David chose several pencils in bold colours and laid them out. Next he placed a spoon and a fork on top and hung some black cloth behind his arrangement. Finally, he put an extra bit of cloth in the foreground to obscure the pencils slightly and make them less recognisable. 'I wanted a slightly different look to other pictures like this,' he says, 'and the primary colours seemed to really jump off the black surroundings.' **Judges say** David has consistently submitted creative and technically superb images all-year long, and this is perhaps his finest yet. The colours and reflections are superb, and he has created an interesting abstract in that he has given us recognisable shapes but made us look at them in new ways. Very well done.



2 John Colmer Leicestershire 36pts

Nikon D200, 18-200mm, 1/125sec at f/8

John was at a Loughborough Reenactment Day looking for abstract images to take when he spotted this old Army ambulance. Normally he prefers to take abstracts in nature, but he liked the symmetry and simplicity of the red cross when framed tightly. 'There was an awful lot of stuff going on around the ambulance, so a wider view would have been too busy for an image,' he says. **Judges say** We agree with John. The tight crop is what makes this image so striking. Very well observed.

3 Yari Beno West Sussex 35pts

Nikon D300, 30mm,

Yari, a BP engineer, took up photography about four years ago just after he moved to the UK from Slovakia. This image of his fiancé was made in the Czech Republic in an old abandoned house that Yari knew had eerie lighting. 'My fiancé is a ballet dancer, so I had an idea to put a little water on the ground in front of her and set a rubber duck in the puddle,' he says. 'I thought the yellow contrasted well against her red socks.' **Judges say** Yari has shown remarkable skill and creativity to make a unique image that is full of atmosphere.





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APOY 2009

AMATEUR PHOTOGRAPHER OF THE YEAR COMPETITION

In our **Bold Colour** round of APOY you overwhelmed us with a rainbow of skies and flowers, and a cheeky pair of socks

David Meredith, of Warwickshire, has won first prize in our **Bold Colour** round of APOY, winning a Canon EOS 500D standard kit, worth £1,399.99. The Canon EOS 500D is a 15-million-pixel DSLR shooting at up to 3.4fps with up to 170 JPEG burst, as well as a nine-point AF and a high ISO up to 12800, making it ideal for low-light conditions. Included in the kit is Canon's EF-S 200mm f/3.5-5.6 IS lens. With a zoom range of 11x and four-stop Image Stabilizer, it is the perfect all-rounder.

Second prize of a Canon PowerShot SX10 IS, worth £399, goes to **John Colmer**, of Leicestershire. The 10MP PowerShot SX10 IS features a 20x wideangle zoom with optical Image Stabilizer for great telephoto performance.

In third place, **Yari Beno**, of West Sussex, will receive a Canon Pixma MP630 printer, worth £179. Boasting 9600x2400dpi and 1pl photolab-quality prints, the Pixma MP630 uses five single inks and can produce a 10x15cm borderless photo in around 20 seconds.

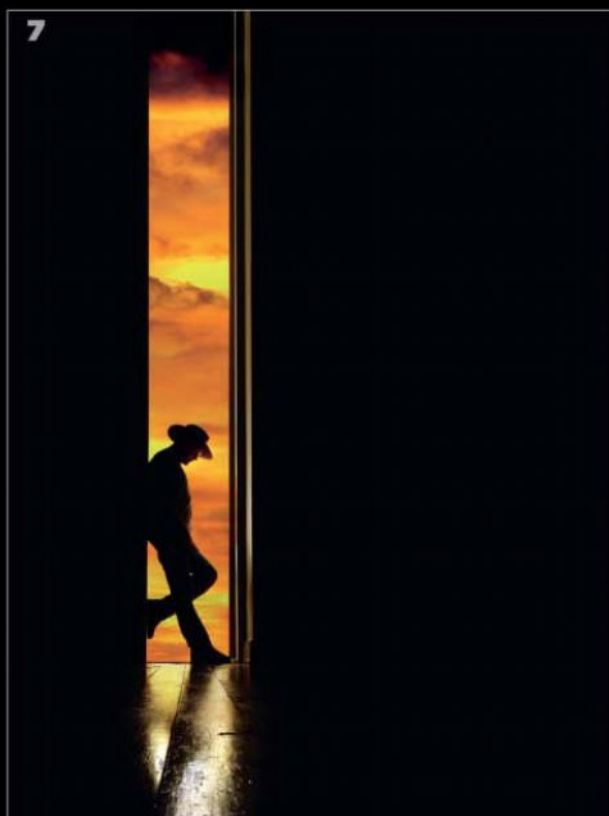
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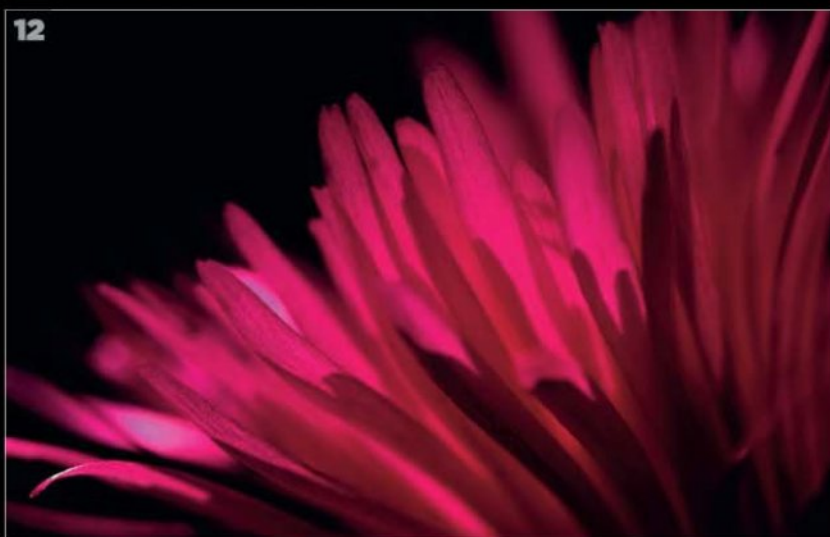
Once again, our leader board remains largely intact after our Bold Colour round. As usual, our judges were faced with a difficult choice in choosing a winner, as you provided a diverse and creative range of images in your entries. In the end, I think you'll agree they made the best choices.

Holding on to the top spot of the leader board is **Kathy Wright**, who by making the top 50 again this round solidifies her lead over 2007 winner **Mani Puthuran**, who also finished in the top 50. **Barry Harrington**, meanwhile, drops down to seventh place after missing out on the shortlist this month.

This means that **Sean Slevin**, **Phil Hargreaves**, **Peter Holloway** and **Lee Jeffries** all move up a spot, while **Gary McGhee** and **Patrick Dodds** keep their positions to round out the top ten. Be sure to catch the results of Round 8, **Reflection**, in AP 31 October, and our announcement of Round 9, **From a Low Angle**, in AP 3 October.

1	Kathy Wright	195pts	6	Lee Jeffries	146pts
2	Mani Puthuran	174pts	7	Barry Harrington	136pts
3	Sean Slevin	166pts	8	David Meredith	135pts
4	Phil Hargreaves	162pts	9	Gary McGhee	132pts
5	Peter Holloway	157pts	9	Patrick Dodds	132pts





4 Lee Jeffries Greater Manchester **34pts**

Nikon D3, 14-24mm, 1/640sec at f/2.8
Woman in lake **Judges say** Along with the stunning colour captured in the sky in the background, the woman's pose and the ripples in the water give the viewer bags of detail to follow throughout the frame. A remarkable achievement

5 James Rowland Kent **34pts**

Nikon D2Xs, 80-200mm, 1/400sec at f/6.3, ISO 200
Poppy **Judges** James subtly blended some textured layers in the background to give this image a distinctive look

6 Peter Brett York **34pts**

Pentax ist D, 18-35mm, 1/350sec at f/8
Peter's daughter playing with a balloon **Judges say** Sometimes images have a strong sense of time and place, and this is one. It screams youth and summer, and the colours are wonderful

7 Sean Slevin Co Wexford, Ireland **34pts**

Fujifilm FinePix S7000
'Sundown' **Judges say** Part 'Marlboro Man' and part Hollywood still, there is an iconic feel to Sean's image, as well as an air of mystery as to who this is and where he is standing

8 Peter Holloway Merseyside **33pts**

Olympus E-620, 14-54mm, 1/100sec at f/6.3, ISO 200
Southport Flower Show **Judges say** Peter has captured stunning contrast that gives depth and shape to his image. The flower seems to leap out of the frame

9 Phil Hargreaves Lancashire **32pts**

Canon 40D, 100mm macro, 1sec at f/8, ISO 100
Special-edition Coca Cola bottle **Judges say** By framing the bottle against the left edge of the frame, Phil has created a study in shape and form. We love its simplicity, and the three strong colours seem to complement this

10 Paul Whiting Hampshire **32pts**

Nikon D70, 70-200mm, 1/20sec at f/22
Buildings and sky reflected in canal near Venice **Judges say** Paul did very well to capture such bold colours in the strong currents that run through Venice's canals to create this wonderful abstract

11 Philip Westwood East Sussex **31pts**

Canon EOS 40D, 17-85mm, 1/100sec at f/5.6
Striped socks **Judges say** One of our most original images this round. Philip has used the perfect lighting and background for this humorous take on the theme

12 Henrique Souto Lisbon, Portugal **31pts**

Pentax ist DL, 105mm macro, f/5.6
Red lampranthus **Judges say** Henrique used only natural lighting to capture this wonderfully vibrant flower from an interesting angle

13 Graham Jones Bedfordshire **30pts**

Olympus Camedia C-5060, 1/60sec at f/3.2
Blue paint spilled on the road **Judges say** Very well spotted. We like the tight frame

14 David Kittos Surrey **30pts**

Olympus E-30, 105mm, 1/30sec at f/8, ISO 200, Nikon SB28 flash, Cactus v2S trigger
Red liquid splashing into a Martini glass **Judges say** This is a bold, striking picture with fabulous contrast. Well done

15 Meredith Wilson Greater London **30pts**

Canon EOS 20D, 24-70mm, 1/80sec at f/4, ISO 200
Japanese maple leaf at Westonbirt Arboretum, Gloucestershire **Judges say** Meredith has chosen an interesting subject and framed it well against a similarly coloured background that isn't too distracting



16 Kathy Wright Norfolk
Canon EOS 5D, 24-70mm, 1/100sec at f/7, ISO 100
Poppies in a field of barley **Judges say** We love the low angle and how Kathy has taken advantage of the wonderful light to create an image that is full of rich saturation

30pts

19 Tim Oram Suffolk
Nikon D200, 24-85mm, 1/160sec at f/11
Beach hut at Southwold, Suffolk **Judges say** Tim has given the sky enough room at the top of the frame to show off the contrast between the three colours

28pts

17 Patrick Dodds Surrey
Nikon D700, 28-105mm, 1/90sec
Coloured pencils **Judges say** A wonderful arrangement that is well lit. We love the contrast and overhead view

29pts

20 Alan Brown Birmingham
Nikon D3, 24-120mm, 1/400sec at f/8
A local park on a cold February morning **Judges say** Out looking for misty shots, Alan spotted this beautiful, striking scene. We love the symmetry of the reflection and the strong, vibrant red that runs throughout the frame

28pts

18 Nick Pither Lincolnshire
Canon EOS 400D, 18mm, 1/500sec at f/3.5
Tent in a field **Judges say** We love the stunning light and rich saturation of the colours. This could easily have been a dull shot, but Nick's technical ability and keen eye have transformed this into a very atmospheric scene

29pts

21 Chris Warner West Yorkshire
Canon EOS 5D, 24-105mm, 1/160sec at f/16
Recovery vehicle **Judges say** Chris demonstrated his obvious eye for a good picture by getting down low to frame this blue vehicle against an equally bold, blue sky to create a very striking image

28pts



22 Ian Scotland West Sussex **28pts**
Nikon D300, 18-200mm, 1/60sec at f/3.8, ISO 100, 2x Nikon SB800 flash

Corridor **Judges say** Ian very skilfully fired one purple-gelled flash in a darkened room with his camera and one orange-gelled flash in the corridor, lighting the rear room with sunlight through yellow curtains to create this atmospheric image

23 Ricardo Alarcon Gloucestershire **27pts**
Nikon D90, 18-105mm, 1/15sec at f/18

Angel of the North **Judges say** Ricardo has taken an oft-photographed subject and used an interesting angle to make it stand out. It's a well-conceived photograph

24 Agnes Bodor Seattle, USA **27pts**
Nikon D300, 18mm, 1/1600sec at f/3.5

Hot springs, Yellowstone National Park, USA **Judges say** This unusual landscape is full of vibrant colour. A brilliant capture



25 Andrew Lever Dorset **27pts**
Nikon D80, 18-70mm

Fisherman cutting fish in Cape Verde Islands **Judges say** This is a well-spotted detail amid a scene that must have been full of them. Well done



26 Gary McGhee Merseyside **27pts**
Nikon D200, 10-20mm, 1/6sec at f/4, ISO 100

Lone tree in the Yorkshire Dales **Judges say** We love the range of tones in the sky and the warm light cast across the ground



27 Guy Standen West Sussex **27pts**
Canon EOS 3, 27-70mm, 1/125sec at f/8, Fujichrome Provia 100

Hats drying in the sun at a factory in Thailand **Judges say** Guy has captured beautiful colours and a stunning arrangement that remind us of a kaleidoscope



28 Nick Hatton Cheshire **27pts**
Canon EOS 400D, 10-20mm, 1/125sec at f/8

Sunflowers in the Loire Valley, France **Judges say** We love how Nick has framed one flower large in the foreground to create a sense of depth and perspective



29 Peter Wiles Gloucestershire **27pts**
Olympus E-500, 14-45mm, 1/200sec at f/9

Blue kite on white landscape **Judges say** This is a very well-spotted scene, and we love the stark contrast of the kite



30 Tony Cooper Leicestershire **27pts**
Nikon D200, 18-200mm, 1/13sec at f/13, ISO 100

Tent at Whitby Abbey, North Yorkshire **Judges say** Very strong colours and keen use of leading lines. The perfect composition





Expert advice, help and tips from AP Editor Damien Demolder

Appraisal

Pitcher plant

Bogdan Chorostian

Nikon D300, 105mm micro,
1/800sec at f/3.2

Bogdan has chosen a wonderful subject in this pitcher plant, which has strong but not overpowering colours. Colours like these can be quite difficult to show in a photograph, because you need to choose a background that will show them off rather than subdue them. However, because the colours don't really go very well – think of the rhyme 'pink and green should never be seen, except upon a beauty queen' – there are not many colours you could use as a background that wouldn't clash or distract from the plant. Therefore, Bogdan's choice of a neutral slate-grey background is a good one that allows the colours to be muted as they are in reality, but which still allows them to stand out.

Bogdan chose to shoot this picture at a very wide aperture of f/3.2 using a 105mm micro lens on his Nikon D300. In effect, this gives an equivalent focal length of around 150mm, and with an aperture of f/3.2 this gives an very shallow depth of field. I'm a great fan of shallow depth of field because it makes things stand out and draws attention to your subject, but in this case Bogdan's depth of field is too shallow to show off the plant properly. I love the out-of-focus areas where the red veins run across the green and white background; it looks as though he has deliberately created this effect, so it works. The sharp areas also look good, but when they are combined I can't help feeling that a shallow depth of field is not appropriate for this shot, especially



with the slate background. It looks as though it's a studio shot, and for that reason Bogdan should have tried to show all details of the plant.

When you use a shallow depth of field you need to be careful about which part of your subject you focus on. In this case, the lip and ruffle of the

plant are not enough. It looks as though the camera has automatically chosen its focus point as the closest part of the plant, and that Bogdan has just gone with it. I think an aperture of at least f/8 or f/11 is necessary here to show the subject in a way that looks crisp all over. It is a great attempt, though.

How to submit your pictures

Send up to six prints, slides or images on CD (please include the original files from the camera along with your submitted versions on your CD). Tell us a little about the pictures and, if you can, include details of equipment used and exposure settings.

Send your photographs to 'Appraisal' at our usual address (see page 3). Please enclose an SAE if you would like them returned.





Original



Edited

Goldfish John Humphrey

Canon EOS 5D Mark II, 100mm macro, 1/400sec at f/5.6, ISO 400

John has photographed a bag of goldfish he bought for his garden pond, and it's a really interesting view. It's like looking at the goldfish equivalent of the hall of mirrors, because the plastic of the bag has created so much warping and distortion that your attention is immediately caught.

Looking at fish through flat glass is bizarre enough, but here we're seeing them through a bent and distorted thin layer of plastic and they really stand out. The fish have, by luck, positioned themselves in convenient spots in the frame to make a nice shape, and John has succeeded in getting the focus correct on the foremost fish and its eye, and we're immediately drawn to it. His composition then takes us to the fish above it, and then eventually on to the fish that is looking slightly left behind

the main subject. It's a great idea and one that John has managed to execute pretty well.

My only issue is that it's slightly lacking in contrast and a little flat. I think that comes down to whatever is behind the bag, along with how the fish have been lit in the background. The light isn't very directional, which has left the fish a tad flat against that monochromatic background. I've lightened it up a bit and added some contrast, but really it needed more direct lighting and a lighter background to lift the fish from the orange. There's a three-dimensional quality that's missing.

The expressions on the faces of the fish are brilliant, though. All John needs to do next time is run his eye over the scene before he releases the shutter and see if there is anything he can do to make his subject stand



Damien's picture

The fish have, by luck, positioned themselves in convenient spots in the frame

out more. On this occasion, a clearer or whiter background would have changed this from a good shot into an excellent shot.

I've added a picture I took of some nicely backlit goldfish for sale in Thailand. I didn't get as close as John did, but you get the idea. These fish were in bags hanging next to identical bags of fruit juice. It made me concerned they were meant as a light snack to go with your pineapple.

The National Gallery, London Andy Johnstone

Nikon D80, 22mm, 8secs at f/11, ISO 100

It's not easy to take a picture of a London landmark and come up with an original image. Pretty much everything in London has been photographed to death, yet people tend to photograph these landmarks from exactly the same place and in exactly the same way. This is probably because every landmark has an obvious position from which to shoot. Andy's collection of pictures of London landmarks are all interesting, because in each of them he has tried to capture a different, unusual view.

The one that stood out for me, though, was this image of the National

Gallery and Trafalgar Square. It's tricky to take pictures there, particularly because the security people in Trafalgar Square quickly perceive you as some sort of terrorist/paedophile threat and move you on. It's also extremely busy, and you get people constantly moving in and out of your pictures. Also, if like Andy you want to set up a tripod, you really need luck and a fair wind behind you.

Andy needed a tripod here because he's made an 8sec exposure. He set his ISO to 100 and his aperture to f/11, so he's not letting much light onto his camera's sensor. It's a great

choice of aperture because Andy has achieved fantastic depth of field, from the fountain and statues in the foreground to the gallery in the background. Something I particularly like is the fact that the sky is a nice warm blue rather than a jet black, which often makes the contrast look too hard. He's also got a great white balance for the building, which is difficult when there are so many different types of lighting. Andy has found a nice compromise that gives us an idea of what we would see with our eyes if we were there, without allowing the heavy coloration of some

of those sodium and tungsten lamps to come through.

It's a great composition that leads into the picture between the two fountains, and then on to the main entrance of the museum and the beams of light up into the sky. It's an interesting angle, too, because people don't tend to photograph this building looking up from below, and Andy has managed to keep everything reasonably straight. It's not a view you see very often. It's also nicely cropped to an unusual shape, and for all those reasons it's my picture of the week.

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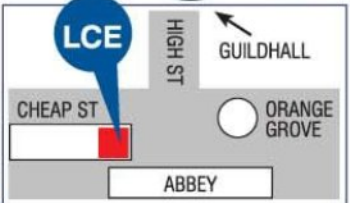
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Welcome to our test, reviews and advice section. Over the next few pages we will present this week's equipment tests, reader questions and technique pointers

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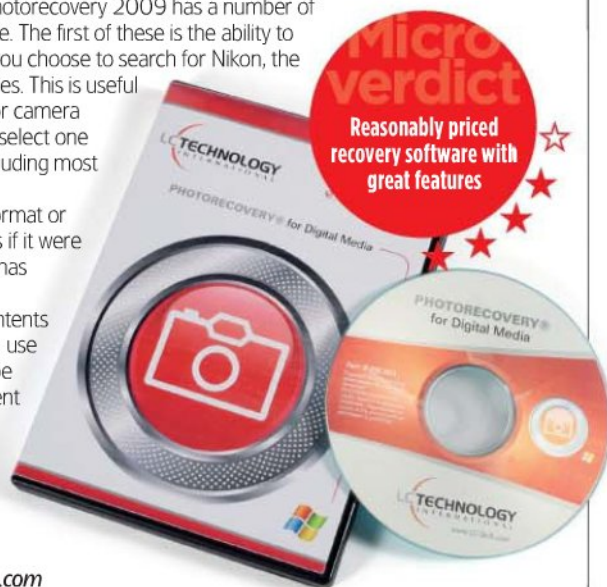
RELIABLE image-recovery software should form part of every digital photographer's computer setup. Try as we might, memory cards do corrupt, and recovery software can be vital for retrieving images and other media. Photorecovery 2009 has a number of useful features that are rarely found with cheaper software. The first of these is the ability to search by camera manufacturer for files. For example, if you choose to search for Nikon, the software scans a memory card for JPEG, TIFF and NEF files. This is useful if you use a card in more than one camera. All other major camera manufacturers are included. Alternatively, you can simply select one of the other 60 file types that are available to recover, including most common image, video and Microsoft Office file types.

Once data has been recovered, there is the option to format or wipe the card. Wiping the card erases all data, leaving it as if it were new. This may help to make the card fully operational if it has been corrupted or is unusable.

The most useful feature is the option to back up the contents of a corrupt card to your hard disk. The software can then use the virtual copy of the card to recover the data. This can be useful if your card has an intermittent fault that may prevent image recovery taking place.

I scanned an 8GB Lexar UDMA CompactFlash card, which took around one hour. It managed to recover 63 images that had previously not shown up as being on the card. **Richard Sibley**

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waist strap on the 220 AW help to minimise the movement of the bags. I found them very comfortable to carry when fully laden.

I was able to fit a medium-sized DSLR, such as an Olympus E-30, with a standard zoom lens attached and two or three other lenses, plus a few small accessories, in the Classified Sling 180 AW. The larger 220 AW has enough space to accommodate a two-DSLR kit and a couple of lenses, plus a flashgun or two. Both bags have Velcro-fixing interior dividers, so they can be customised for the user's needs.

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Angela Nicholson

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- The Flash consists of a main control unit which fits directly onto the camera hot shoe, and a separate ring light unit which connects to the lens filter thread. It is ideal for Macro / Close-up photography as the flash light source is positioned directly between the camera lens and subject, allowing for even / shadowless illumination.
- The Ring Flash has a 14m guide number (100 ISO) and features auto TTL exposure. The lens mount is 52mm, with stepping rings included for 55mm, 58mm, 62mm and 67mm sizes.
- The Marumi Ring Flash is available in either Canon or Nikon fit and is compatible with their E-TTL / E-TTL11 and i-TTL flash metering systems.

Amateur Photographer Magazine

"Particularly suited to those photographers who are experimenting with macro photography for the first time." *Richard Sibley*

"Excellent value"



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gave the
MARUMI Ring Flash
★★★★★

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Canon Pixma Pro 9500 Mark II

Canon's Pixma Pro 9500 has undergone a few changes. **Richard Sibley** tests the Mark II version to see whether it offers the same standard of printing as its predecessor



ANNOUNCED at the same time as the Canon Pixma Pro 9000 Mark II (reviewed AP 27 June 2009), the updated 9500 Mark II, unlike its sibling, uses pigment rather than dye-based inks.

Pigment-based inks offer better longevity and light-fastness compared to dye-based inks, and costing more than £650, the 9500 Mark II is clearly aimed at enthusiast or semi-professional photographers who demand long-lasting prints for display or sale.

Canon has been trying to perfect pigment printing in its high-spec home printers for a number of years now, but it has always lagged behind Epson which has led the market with its Stylus R2400 and, more recently, R2880 printers.

Specification

Looking at the specification sheets of the previous Pixma Pro 9500 and the Mark II version it appears little has been changed – most of the updates are software or firmware based. The print resolution remains the same at 4800x2400dpi as does the ink-head which is capable of producing droplets of just 3pl in size.

The printer uses ten Canon Lucia pigment ink cartridges (see data file) which allow it to print up to 276 trillion colours.

A wealth of software is also included with the Pro 9500 Mark II printer, including Adobe Photoshop Elements 6 (for both Mac and PC) and a new plug-in for Photoshop products, and Canon's own Digital Photo Professional software allows you to directly print images from raw files.

However, the most interesting software is restricted for users with Microsoft Windows Vista. Easy-Photo Print Pro has Ambient Light Technology, which adjusts the colours of the print slightly depending on the lighting used in the room in which the print is to be displayed.

Build and handling

There is virtually no difference in the build of the Pixma Pro 9500 and the

Mark II version. Both can print onto A3+ (329x483mm) paper and other media up to 1.2mm thick, by utilising a secondary, flat printing path, at the front of the printer.

Interestingly the printer's head unit isn't pre-installed and must be fitted into place when you first use the printer. Doing so is as simple a process as installing an ink cartridge and has the advantage of making the print head an easily replaceable part, should it become blocked or damaged.

In terms of size, the printer will take up some serious real estate on most people's desks. Measuring 660x354x191mm and weighing 15.2kg it has a large footprint and if you plan to print thicker materials you will need around 25cm clearance at the back of the printer.

Printing times

Printing a colour A3 image at best-quality setting takes around 8 minutes, 15 seconds while a colour A4 print at the same quality setting takes 5mins.

Some reviewers have noted that switching the printer to greyscale mode for black & white images slows down the print speed. However, during the test I timed two prints made this way and actually noticed very little difference in print time.

One thing the 9500 Mark II does seem to do quite frequently is perform maintenance tasks. In fact, the 9500 Mark II once took 1 minute 15 seconds between pressing print and drawing in a sheet of paper. All the time it was busy whirring away, presumably cleaning the print heads.

Performance

One of the major selling points of the printer is its black & white printing capabilities.

There are two ways to print a black & white image. First, if you tick the greyscale option in the Canon printer driver only the black and grey inks will be used, and the result is a print with an excellent range of grey tones.

You can also print a black & white image without clicking the greyscale option, which makes the colour inks

available for use. In the test this gave an ever-so-slight magenta tint to the print, although I doubt I would have noticed it if viewed in isolation. I also found that this method produces a higher contrast b&w print.

Glossy colour prints made using Canon's Pro Platinum paper have deep blacks and colour that closely matches the original image.

While the pigment inks of the 9500 Mark II produce a deep black on gloss paper, I wasn't too impressed with the density of the black when using matt paper. At first I was worried that I may have done something wrong. However, I double-checked all the cartridges, produced a Canon test print using the utility software and still found no fault. Using Adobe Photoshop's soft proofing to check to see how the software thought a print should look confirmed that the blacks are not very black but more of

a dark charcoal grey. Also of concern was an area between dark grey and matt black that is out of gamut (see test chart) in some examples and, if not managed carefully with curves adjustments, caused banding.

Verdict

There is a lot to like about the Pixma Pro 9500 Mark II and when used with high-quality gloss paper it produces excellent prints. What's more, the pigment inks mean that the prints should last a lifetime.

However, the Pixma Pro 9500 Mark II struggles when printing images on matt paper. This is more of an issue when printing greyscale images; and prints lack contrast and it can be taxing to get a print that is OK at best.

If pigment inks are not important to you I'd recommend the more-affordable Canon Pixma Pro 9000 Mark II. **AP**



Digital file

Print

Data file

Canon UK, Woodhatch, Reigate, Surrey RH2 8BF. Tel: 01737 220 000. Website: www.canon.co.uk

RRP	£729.99
Max print size	A3+ (rear), 35.56x43cm (front)
Resolution	4800x2400dpi
Min droplet size	3pl
Print head	FINE print head
Ink system	Lucia pigment-based inks in cyan, magenta, yellow, photo cyan, photo magenta, red, green, grey, photo black and matt black
Interface	USB 2.0 High Speed and PictBridge
Dimensions	660x355x193mm
Weight	15.2kg

Lab results

Specification	●●●●●●●●●●	28/30
Build	●●●●●●●●●●	17/20
Handling	●●●●●●●●●●	18/20
Performance	●●●●●●●●●●	23/30

86%

Nikon D300s

The **Nikon D300s** replaces the popular D300 as Nikon's flagship DX-format DSLR, and brings HD video capture plus a host of other refinements. Is this Nikon's most complete enthusiast DSLR yet?

Barney Britton
Technical Writer



THE Nikon D300 was released very nearly two years ago, and since its introduction it has become one of the most popular DSLRs on the market. It has won a host of awards, and positive reviews from magazines and websites all over the world.

Nothing lasts forever, though, and two years on the D300 has retired, to be replaced by the new D300s. The 's', following Nikon's standard nomenclature, designates an upgrade to an existing camera, rather than a completely new model, and accordingly, the D300s is very similar to the camera it replaces. In

many respects, in fact, it is identical. The key additions to the feature set are some subtle ergonomic changes, and a new HD (720p) video recording mode. The addition of a video option reflects the changes in the DSLR marketplace since 2007, and means that the D300s joins the D90 and D5000 in Nikon's burgeoning 'convergence' range. Today's enthusiast photographers have started to expect HD video, even if they don't necessarily intend to use it. To this end, Nikon's decision to include a stereo input jack for an external microphone sets it apart from the D90, and places it in a more serious (at least as far as keen videographers

are concerned) category, alongside the Pentax K-7 and Canon EOS 5D Mark II. Although the lack of any additional major new features to the D300's basic specification has surprised some industry watchers, Nikon will be hoping that by adding video – one of the few features that the D300 lacked compared to its peers – it can 'futureproof' the camera in the medium term.

Features

Inevitably, the D300s shares much of its specification with the now discontinued D300, and as such, I would advise interested readers to refer

Nikon D300s
Top-end enthusiast DSLR



At a glance

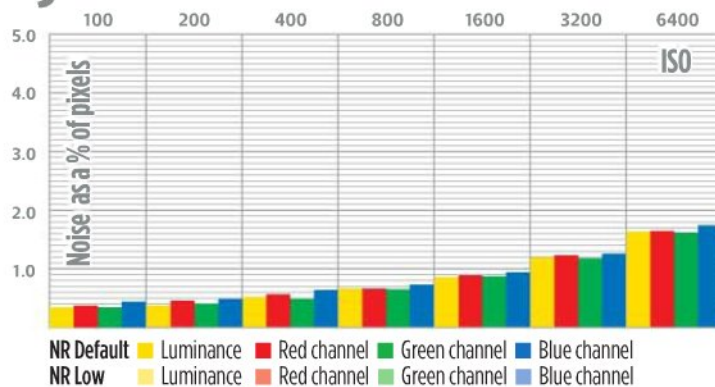
- 12.3 million effective pixels
- 720p HD video recording
- ISO 100-6400 (equivalent)
- 3in, 920,000 dot LCD screen
- RRP £1,499.99 (body only)

**Amateur
Photographer
Lab test**



Resolution, noise and sensitivity

As we can see from the images of AP's test chart opposite, the Nikon D300s offers excellent resolution for its pixel count, on a par with the best of its 12-million-pixel competition. At low ISO settings the D300s can also compete with the full-frame D700 and D3, although as the sensitivity is pushed higher, performance drops off a little. That said, even at ISO 6400 the D300s can record an impressive amount of detail, albeit accompanied by considerable chroma and luminance noise. Chroma noise is more of a problem in the D300s's files than luminance, which takes the appearance of a subtle graininess. Chroma noise is dealt with successfully in JPEG files



by in-camera processing, but high ISO noise reduction should be set to 'off' or

'low' by preference, since it can have a significant impact on detail resolution.

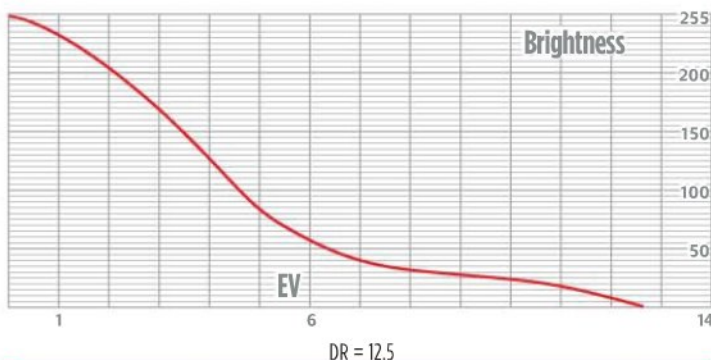
The noise graph shown here displays noise in JPEG files with high ISO noise reduction turned 'off'. For small prints, high ISO noise reduction can safely be set to 'high', and it will deliver smooth noise-free results without any visible penalty in detail reproduction. For optimal resolution, however, shooting in the NEF (raw) format and applying careful noise reduction and sharpening is the best option. This workflow is more labour-intensive, but with a little care and attention the D300s can deliver excellent, highly detailed results right up to its maximum ISO sensitivity setting.

●●●●●●●●●● 27/30

Dynamic range

The dynamic range of the Nikon D300s is excellent, at around 12.5EV at base ISO sensitivity in AP's test conditions. This puts it on a level with the best of the APS-C and full-frame competition, and realistically, this figure represents a plateau in the capabilities of conventional sensors. A dynamic range much wider than this would risk a significant contrast loss. At the D300s's lowest ISO sensitivity setting of 100 (equivalent) dynamic range is reduced, because rather than being a 'native' setting, ISO 100 is achieved by underexposure, followed by adjustment to give a 'correct' exposure. This process clips highlight detail significantly.

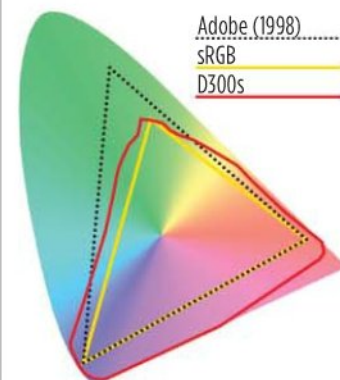
Although it doesn't increase dynamic range in the strictest sense, Nikon's Active D-Lighting allows you to make the most of the sensor's ability to record detail in midtone and shadow areas.



Understanding the graph

This graph shows the brightness values recorded by the test camera when it is used to photograph a stepped graduation wedge. The wedge has transmission values in 1/2EV steps ranging from 0 to 12EV. The camera's exposure is set so the 12EV section in the wedge has a brightness value of 255. Software analysis of the image then determines the recorded brightness values of all the other steps and calculates the camera's dynamic range.

Gamut



When set to the Adobe RGB colour space the Nikon D300s is capable of reproducing a wider range of red, magenta, purple and blue tones than is contained within the sRGB gamut. However, although it still covers more than sRGB, it struggles to record all of the green and emerald tones in the full Adobe RGB colour space.

●●●●●●●●●● 9/10

to AP's past tests listed at the end of the 'Competitors' section on page 50 for additional information and analysis. However, because it is a new camera, I will still go over the key features of the D300s in full, albeit with more emphasis on the new aspects of the specification.

Key to the Nikon D300s specification is its 12.3-million-pixel CMOS sensor, which is the same unit as that fitted to the D300, and (minor tweaks notwithstanding) the D90 and D5000. Its ISO sensitivity range spans ISO 200–3200, with 'lo' and 'hi' extension settings adding ISO 100 and 6400 (equivalent) to the range. However, obviously the sensor in the D300s does something that its predecessor could not – it records

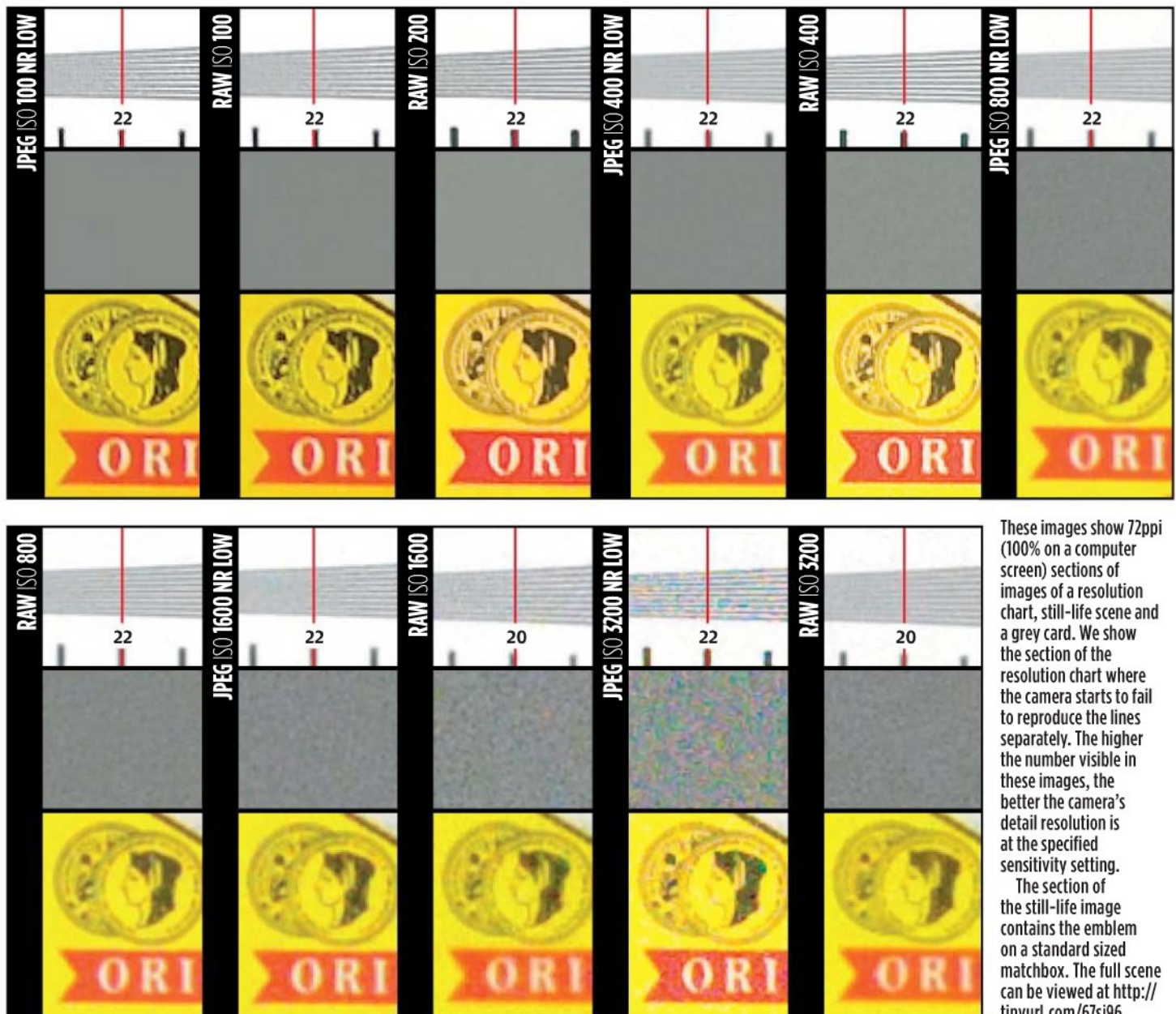
video footage. The video mode of the D300s has the same basic specification as the D90, allowing 720p (1280x720 pixels) HD video at 24fps, for a maximum duration of five minutes in best-quality capture mode. An in-built monoaural microphone serves to record sound for 'grab' clips, but for more considered video shooting the D300s also offers an option to record sound to an externally mounted stereo microphone, via a conventional audio jack. Images and video are recorded to conventional SD or CompactFlash media, both of which have dedicated slots inside the card bay. We've seen dual-format card slots in DSLRs before, but one thing that makes the D300s unusual, and which will no doubt appeal to videographers, is that the D300s can

be programmed to shoot video to one card bay and still images to another. This might not sound like anything to get excited about, but it makes organising the different file types much easier.

Something else that has been made easier with the D300s compared to the D300 is getting a level horizon. The popular virtual horizon feature of the full-frame D3 and D700 is now included in the D300s. Annoyingly, though, unlike the D3 and D700, the camera cannot be customised to activate the virtual horizon in the camera's viewfinder, but only on its rear LCD screen. This disappointing omission makes the feature useful only when the D300s is used on a tripod. However, the viewfinder on the D300s shows 100% of the image

captured. This is still relatively unusual in APS-C format DSLRs, and coupled with the 100% frame coverage in Live View mode it means that with the D300s what you see on or through the camera is – literally – what you will get in the final image.

The D300s keeps the core AF, metering and white balance systems from the D300, and adopts them without any obvious tweaks or differences. These systems are linked by the innovative scene recognition system, which was introduced by the D300 and D3 in 2007 and has since been included in every DSLR in Nikon's current line-up. The scene recognition system serves many purposes, but all are to the same end – it links the AF, white balance and metering systems, allowing them



These images show 72ppi (100% on a computer screen) sections of images of a resolution chart, still-life scene and a grey card. We show the section of the resolution chart where the camera starts to fail to reproduce the lines separately. The higher the number visible in these images, the better the camera's detail resolution is at the specified sensitivity setting.

The section of the still-life image contains the emblem on a standard sized matchbox. The full scene can be viewed at <http://tinyurl.com/67sj96>

to share information based on the analysis of the scene in front of the camera, captured in real time by a dedicated 1005-pixel CCD sensor. The image captured by the sensor is compared to an in-built 'library' of representative images, and analysed according to its tonal and colour distribution. In this way, the D300s can recognise and track a subject around the AF array in '3D tracking' mode, and even detect human faces, recognise landscape images, and so on. It then biases the metering and white balance systems accordingly.

●●●●●●●●●● 9/10

Build and handling

As the D300s shares almost exactly the same chassis as the D300, its

build quality and handling experience are virtually identical to that of the earlier camera. There are some differences, though, and Nikon has decided to update the ergonomics of the basic D300 chassis to incorporate some of the changes introduced in other recent Nikon DSLRs. To this end, the D300s has a dedicated 'LV' button to initiate Live View, and the all-important multi-controller on the rear of the camera has a separate (unlabelled) 'OK' button at its centre. In my first look of the D300s I suggested that this change constituted a great improvement to the ergonomic experience of using this much-accessed control point. Since then I have spoken to several photographers who have expressed a preference for the 'old' D200 and

D300 multi-point design. With this in mind I will reserve judgment, but for better or worse the change has been made, and in effect, the D300's ergonomics are now identical to the D700. Less controversially, the addition of the separate 'LV' button is convenient in two ways – the first being that Live View is now easier and quicker to activate. This is more important in the video-equipped D300s than it was in the D300 because setting Live View is the first step in initiating video capture. The second benefit is that moving Live View from the shooting mode dial frees up the self-timer allowing it to be used in combination with Live View.

In all other respects, the D300s is identical to the D300. On the camera's top-plate to the left of the

prism is the lockable shooting mode dial, which provides access to the continuous shooting modes, mirror lock-up and self-timer, and above this are three dedicated buttons for setting ISO sensitivity, 'quality' and white balance. Exposure mode and exposure compensation are both selected with dedicated buttons adjacent to the shutter release, and like the D300 and D700, automatic focus modes are dealt with by a three-way switch on the rear of the D300s, and the three metering modes – spot, centreweighted and 3D Matrix – are selected by a dial to the right of the viewfinder, at the centre of which is the exposure/focus lock button.

Although most of the D300s's key shooting





The D300s features the same range of standard 'Picture Control' settings as all current Nikon DSLRs. Here, the 'Neutral' setting has given an atmospheric, if rather subdued colour tone, while 'Vivid' has injected a lot more vibrancy and saturation

parameters are changed using dedicated buttons on the body of the camera, the D300s can be easily customised. The otherwise slick ergonomics fall down a little at this point, and the myriad options in the menu system can be rather bewildering. Fortunately, a 'my menu' tab can be customised to allow often-used functions to be corralled into a separate area, but there are a few inconsistencies in how functions are arranged in the main menu system. I was hoping that Nikon would take the opportunity to do a spot of 'spring cleaning' with the menu of the D300s. However, it seems Nikon thought otherwise. To pick one example, the various different 'image-quality' parameters are still split over four sub-menus. This means it is necessary to go back and forth through four neighbouring tabs to set (respectively) the desired file format, JPEG output resolution, JPEG compression and raw bit depth/compression. You may only need to do this once, but even so, it is oddly complicated, and more time consuming than necessary.

●●●●●●●●●● 9/10

White balance and colour

The D300s didn't present me with any surprises during my shooting for this test. For most purposes, and certainly in daylight, AWB is perfectly capable of providing a natural-looking colour balance. As always, switching to Daylight WB ensures that images take on a more realistic hue that represents the actual temperature of the light, but the very warm Cloudy WB preset should be avoided except in very overcast conditions. In direct sunlight, there is very little difference between the AWB and Daylight WB settings, and if anything, AWB tends to give a slightly warmer, more atmospheric result. In artificial light, the D300s has a tendency (again, shared with the D300, D700 and D3(x)) to 'overneutralise' images, especially under tungsten lighting. In a purely technical sense this represents good performance, but it can lead to skin tones, especially, looking grey. As with all cameras, I would recommend switching to a custom white balance under artificial light, and experimenting with the D300s's colour temperature adjustment feature to fine-tune the colour response if necessary.

Data file

Focal points

Histograms

The D300s features two histogram displays – luminance and the RGB channels separately. In the latter mode, if the image on the screen is zoomed, the histogram changes to show the luminance level of the enlarged area.

Active D-Lighting

At its 'auto' and 'standard' settings the effect of Active D-Lighting is often subtle to the point of being unnoticeable, but the effect at its 'high' and 'extra high' settings is profound, if a little too much for most purposes.

Fine-Tune Optimal Exposure

The D300s's 'fine tune optimal exposure' custom function allows the camera's metering system (in any or all of its three metering patterns) to be universally biased up to 3-1EV in 1/6EV increments.

Continuous Shooting

The D300s can shoot JPEGs and 12-bit raw files at 6 frames per second with its included battery, increasing to 8fps on AC power or with the optional MB-10 grip. 14-bit raw files are captured at a lower rate of 2.5 fps maximum.



Nikon UK Ltd, 380 Richmond House, Kingston upon Thames, Surrey KT2 5PR. Tel: 0208 541 4440. Website: www.nikon.co.uk

RRP	£1,499.99
Sensor	APS-C (DX format) CMOS with 12.3 million effective pixels
Output size	4288 x 2848 pixels
Focal length mag	1.5x
Lens mount	Nikon F
Max file size	Approx 20MB raw, 4MB JPEG (high quality, large)
File format	Raw, JPEG, raw + JPEG simultaneously
Compression	Two-stage JPEG
Colour space	Adobe RGB, sRGB
Shutter type	Electronically controlled focal-plane
Shutter speeds	30-1/8000sec in 1/3 steps plus B to 4mins
Max flash sync	1/250
ISO	ISO 100-6400 in 1/3EV or 1EV steps
Exposure modes	PASM
Metering system	3D Matrix Metering, centreweighted, spot
Exposure comp	±5EV in 1/3 EV steps
Exposure bracketing	±5EV over 3, 5 or 7 exposures in 1/3 or 2/3EV steps
White balance	Auto, seven presets (all with fine-tuning), four custom settings, plus Kelvin setting.
WB bracket	2-9 frames, in 10, 20, or 30 mired stops
Drive mode	Single, continuous (Hi/Lo selectable, 6fps for 100 frames (JPEGs and 12-bit NEF), 2.5 fps (14 bit NEF))
LCD	Fixed 3in TFT with 920,000 dots
Viewfinder type	Optical Pentamirror
Field of view	Approx 100%
Dioptr adjustment	-2 to +1 dioptre
Focusing modes	Manual, single shot AF, continuous AF,
AF points	51 automatically selectable points, single vari-zone selection
DoF preview	Yes
PC socket	Yes
Built-in flash	Yes GN 17m @ ISO 200
Cable release	No, optional remote release
Memory card	SD/SDHC/Compact Flash
Power	Rechargeable Li-Ion battery (supplied)
Connectivity	USB 2.0 Hi-Speed/HDMI
Weight	920g
Dimensions	147x114x74mm

LCD, Live View and video

Shooting mode dial

The shooting mode dial provides access to the advance modes, as well as self-timer, mirror lock-up and the new 'Q' quiet shutter release mode

3in LCD screen

The D300s features the same 920,000 dot LCD screen as the D300. Detail reproduction is excellent, although the lack of anti-reflective coating can make screen glare a problem in bright light

Multi-controller

This control point has been remodelled, and the D300s now features the same type of multi-controller as the D700 and D3. A separate button in the middle of the controller serves as an unlabelled 'OK' selector for confirming settings and menu options

Card slots

The D300s features dual card bays, for both Secure Digital and CompactFlash media. The door to the card bays is now of the D700 type, and slides back and out to open, rather than using a D300-style latch



Camera shown actual size



The D300s has a 3in, 920,000-dot LCD screen, which is identical to that used in the D90, D700 and D3/x. Its detail resolution and clarity are on a par with the best of the competition, but images on the D300s's screen are rather hard to see in bright light. The Canon cameras feature multiple anti-reflective layers built into the screens, but the LCD of the D300s lacks even a surface coating, which makes it more prone to glare when used under direct sunlight. This

isn't necessarily a major limitation when shooting stills, but quickly becomes frustrating in Live View/video mode. Except for the way in which it is activated, the Live View mode of the D300s is almost unchanged from the D300. The only significant addition is a new aeroplane-style tilt indicator that can be displayed on the Live View image (above right). It works well, but a simple horizontal tilt indicator of the sort that can be activated in the viewfinder of

the D700 and D3 would have been less obtrusive and more useful.

In video mode, the D300s performs in much the same way as the D90. The only real difference is the provision for an external microphone. With a Sony stereo mic plugged in, I found that audio quality from the footage is very high. Image quality is excellent, too, and although it is not possible to alter the shutter speed and aperture when shooting, it is at least possible to bias the exposure

using exposure compensation. Like the D5000, though, I would not advise using automatic focus when shooting video. With the in-built monoaural microphone activated, the handling and AF noises are overpowering, and even with an external microphone plugged in the incessant fidgeting of the D300s's contrast-detection AF makes for jerky footage if you need to refocus the scene.

●●●●●●●●●● 8/10



There is little discernable difference between AWB and 'Daylight' WB, but in natural light, AWB can deliver a slightly warmer result. Using the 'Cloudy' WB preset on this moderately overcast day has resulted in an atmospheric, but wholly inaccurate warmth



Alternatively, shooting in raw mode allows the ultimate control.

●●●●●●●●●● 9/10

Metering

The D300s gives very good metering performance in its 3D Matrix metering mode. Unlike earlier Nikon DSLRs, the D300s tends to deliver a relatively bright midtone, which, when a medium grey test target is photographed, measures around 128, exactly midway between 0 (black) and white (255). While this helps to keep JPEG files nice and bright straight from the camera, it increases the risk of highlight detail burning out in scenes with a wide tonal range. As ever, the histogram is the best tool for preventing this from happening.

In general use, the metering system of the D300s is very capable, and I was impressed at the consistency of exposures in a range of different situations. I photographed an air show during my shooting for this test, and normal practice when shooting dark subjects (such as aircraft) against a bright background (the sky in this case) is to set a moderate amount of overexposure from the off, to prevent the subject from becoming a silhouette. However, where other cameras might have struggled, the D300s managed an almost 100% success rate without any intervention.

●●●●●●●●●● 9/10

Autofocus

The D300s features the same 51-point AF system as the D300, which is shared by all Nikon's current high-end DSLRs, from the D300s to the £5,000 24-million pixel D3x. After extended use of all these cameras, I can confidently say that when used properly, this system is

the most capable currently available. In good light, all 51 AF points can be relied on to deliver accurate focus, even when used in '3D Tracking mode', in combination with continuous AF. When the light drops, the accuracy of the peripheral AF points drops slightly, but using the central group of 15 points, reliable AF is still possible even when it is impossible to judge through the viewfinder. It is worth pointing out, too, that of all the many cameras I have used for performance photography, the D300s is one of the few that can accurately track a moving subject in this environment.

One of the reasons the D300s's 3D AF tracking is so reliable is its integration with the Scene Recognition System, which is discussed in the 'Features' section of this test. I took the D300s to an airshow, and it was able repeatedly to accurately track fast-moving aircraft against a cluttered, contrasty background. My success rate wasn't 100%, but after a full day's shooting I went home with far more shots in focus than out of focus.

Contrast detection AF is available in Live View and video modes, and although it is slightly more responsive than the 'first-generation' D300 and D3, it is still no match for phase-detection AF of the type described above. In Live View mode, Nikon calls phase-detection AF 'Quick Mode', and when Live View is activated the mirror flips down momentarily to expose the AF sensor before an image is captured. In contrast detection AF mode the Live View image is uninterrupted. I find Live View most useful for studio and tripod-mounted photography, at which point manual focus, coupled with the powerful screen magnification options, is more practical.

●●●●●●●●●● 9/10

Our verdict

WITH the D300s, Nikon has taken a good camera and made it better. Although there are few 'new' features, those that have been added, like a video mode and quiet shutter release, are of value, and make the D300s a more convincing option when viewed in a shop window beside cameras such as the Canon EOS 7D and Pentax K-7D. Everything that was right about the D300 remains right in the D300s, and core to its performance are AF, white balance and metering systems that are currently second to none. However, there are some things that the D300s cannot do. Its resolution of 12 million pixels might be enough, but it is starting to look rather low compared to some of the competition. Its screen

offers excellent resolution, but Canon's latest DSLRs provide much better anti-reflective coatings, which makes a huge difference when using Live View or shooting video in bright light.

Speaking of video, the inclusion of an external microphone jack makes the D300s more satisfying to use in this mode than the D90, but contrast-detection AF is still slow and jerky, and without an external mic handling and focusing sounds still overpower video footage. At its current price point, the Nikon D300s is undoubtedly a very compelling camera, and represents a better value proposition now than the D300 did a few weeks ago, but has Nikon done enough? The only way we can determine that is with more testing against the current crop of APS-C format DSLRs.

Lab results

Features	●●●●●●●●●●	9/10
Noise/resolution	●●●●●●●●●●	27/30
Dynamic range	●●●●●●●●●●	9/10
LCD/video	●●●●●●●●●●	8/10
Build/handling	●●●●●●●●●●	9/10
Autofocus	●●●●●●●●●●	9/10
Metering	●●●●●●●●●●	9/10
AWB/colour	●●●●●●●●●●	9/10



The competition



Canon EOS 7D

TO BE TESTED



Pentax K-7

DATE TESTED 15 AUGUST 2009

THE D300s is essentially an updated D300, and until midway through writing this test I had thought that it was competing with the same cameras faced by its predecessor, namely the Canon EOS 50D and the Sony Alpha 700. However, in the past few days Canon has released the as yet untested EOS 7D and Sony has discontinued the Alpha 700. Compared to the Canon EOS 7D, the Nikon D300s offers an AF system that will be hard to beat, but cannot compete with the 7D's 18-million-pixel resolution. Also, on paper the EOS 7D should be better in low light, offering an ISO 12,800 (equivalent) setting as well as a range of new and improved features. Apart from the EOS 7D, the Pentax K-7 is a compelling, if flawed mid-range contender, but the only area in which it unarguably betters the D300s is in terms of resolution, offering 14, as opposed to 12 million pixels. The Canon EOS 7D will be subjected to a full AP test as soon as possible, with a dual test to follow soon afterwards. Until then, the D300s remains an excellent camera, but I must reserve judgment for now about how it compares to the competition.

● The D300 was tested in AP 8 December 2007. It was tested against the Olympus E-3 in AP 22 March 2008, against the Canon EOS 5D and 40D in AP 21 June 2008, and against the Canon EOS 50D in AP 1 November 2008. See AP 26 July 2008 for how to get the most out of your Nikon D300.

Q&A

Formula one

David Byford asks If two photographers stand next to each other, one with a Nikon D3x (full-frame FX with 24.5 million pixels) and the other with a Nikon D300 (12.3-million-pixel DX-size sensor), and they both have the same lens fitted, such as a 200mm f/2.8, and they both photograph something, a bird, for example, which photographer will have more pixels covering that bird?

I know the DX-format photographer will have an equivalent to a 300mm lens, but who could print their picture bigger before it lost quality? I'm sure there must be a simple formula for calculating when the extra focal length achieved on a DX sensor is outweighed by the extra number of pixels on an FX sensor.



Richard Sibley replies This sounds like a maths exam question. Say the bird filled 10% of the frame in the Nikon D3x, it would be made of 2.45 million pixels, which is 10% of the D3x's resolution.

The D300's APS-C-size sensor gives it a 150% magnification ratio over the D3x, so the bird will fill 15% of its frame and be made up of 15% of 12.3 million pixels, which is 1.845 million pixels – still less than the D3x. Four-Thirds and Micro Four Thirds cameras have 200% magnification ratio over full-frame cameras, so the bird will take up 20% of the frame. This equates, on a 12.1-million-pixel Four Thirds sensor, to 2.42 million pixels, which

is marginally short of the D3x. This is one reason why the Four Thirds format is so popular with wildlife photographers.

This means the D3x should contain the most detail for larger prints. But there are other considerations such as the size of the photosites and how far apart they are.

The more densely packed they are, the more detail they should be able to resolve. However, as each photosite then has to be smaller, they let in less light, which can often cause image noise as the ISO increases. Reducing this image noise can cause the loss of detail.



Compatibility concerns

Jo Wolfe writes I am thinking of upgrading to the latest Apple OSX 10.6 Snow Leopard operating system, but could you tell me whether Nikon Capture NX2 and Adobe Photoshop CS3 will be compatible?

Richard Sibley replies Some users have reported problems with Nikon Capture NX2 and Nikon View since upgrading to Snow Leopard. I spoke to Nikon UK, which released the following statement: 'Nikon is currently in the process of testing compatibility of Apple's Snow Leopard with Capture NX2. A Q&A will be posted on the website once testing is complete to advise users of compatibility with Apple's Snow Leopard. Unfortunately, until testing is complete we would advise users to continue running the software on recommended operating systems.'

Adobe has been working with Apple and there shouldn't be any compatibility issues with any of the Adobe CS4 products, including Photoshop. However, Adobe has announced that CS3 and older products have not been tested, and while users may not have any problems Adobe doesn't guarantee compatibility. Early reports suggest you probably won't encounter any major problems with CS3.

For full details on the compatibility of Adobe Creative Suite products and Apple Snow Leopard, visit www.adobe.com/products/creativesuite/faq.



Should I turn it off?

Terry Atterbury asks I use a Nikon 16-85mm AFS f/3.5-5.6 G ED VR DX lens on a Nikon D90 body. The booklet that came with the lens says the VR should be switched off when the camera is mounted on a tripod.

However, when I recently took some shots on my tripod, I forgot to switch off the VR but found that it made no apparent difference. Why does Nikon recommend switching off the VR when using a tripod? I understand, of course, that VR would not be required, but is there a problem of which I am unaware?

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FAQ

Frequently Asked Question

With cameras now a standard feature on mobile phones, we are often asked whether they might replace conventional cameras.

The answer depends on what you intend to do with your images. Camera phones allow us to record events and send them almost instantly to another person, even if

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Your questions answered



Finding a host for my website

Mr_P asks I'm about to start my own website, so could you tell me about different hosting sites and the best options to go for?

Norman replies Do you need a domain name? If so, try to find a hosting site that offers a free domain name (although they are not very expensive if you do need to pay extra).

Do you need help setting up the site? If so, look for hosting that includes some templates that you can modify for your own use.

How will you upload your files? You will need some FTP software. Search for it in download.com or use something like Dreamweaver that is both an HTML editor and FTP client.

A Google search will find you lots of web-hosting companies. Take a look at their sites and prices.

AlexMonro replies The downside of registering the domain name with the website host is that they may make it more difficult for you to take the domain name with you should you find you ever want to move hosting companies. If you get your own domain name registered to you direct from the top-level registrar (Nominet for .uk domains) you have more flexibility and security, at the cost of slightly more hassle. Some hosting companies register you directly with Nominet anyway, and you get your own certificate.

TheFatControllerR replies Personally, I wouldn't go with Nominet. Renewals can be more expensive than using a hosting company and it's a far more complex process.

Richard Sibley replies In the past I have used www.123-reg.co.uk for both registering domain names and hosting small websites. I've found them to be reasonably good value and fairly straightforward to set up. For those intimidated by web design they offer a range of templates and other services.

Richard Sibley replies Stabilisation systems, such as Nikon's VR system, work by using a series of gyroscopic motors to move a floating lens element to counter slight vibrations.

The VR system is activated when you half-press the shutter button. When the camera is attached to a tripod, there is a risk of the system behaving erratically by attempting to correct for movement where there is none. This can result in images being

blurred. This is less of an issue with modern systems, but older VR modules can cause problems.

Nikon recommends that the VR is turned off when the camera and lens are locked to a tripod head, but it can be left on when using a pan-and-tilt head.

If you'd like to know which lenses can be left on when locked to a tripod or when in pan-and-tilt mode, visit http://support.nikontech.com/app/answers/detail/a_id/7676.

the highest resolution camera phones. Many camera phones can have sensors as small as 1/6in, which measure just 1.8x2.4mm and have an image area of 4.32mm². Compare this to a 1/1.8in sensor in a typical compact camera, which measures 7.18x5.32mm with a surface area 43.3mm². It is a bit like comparing 35mm film with 120 film.

So with the current technology available, the size of mobile phones prevents them producing images comparable to those from a 'proper' camera. That's not to say it won't ever be possible, but it will take a big leap in image sensor technology. **Richard Sibley**

they are the other side of the world. In fact, when a major news event breaks, it is often the public with camera phones who provide us with the initial images we see. From this viewpoint camera phones have changed the way we're exposed to and view images, and provided opportunities to take photographs many would otherwise not have had.

Indeed, a (now defunct) news-based picture agency called Scoop was set up in 2005 for amateurs using mobile phones or compact cameras.

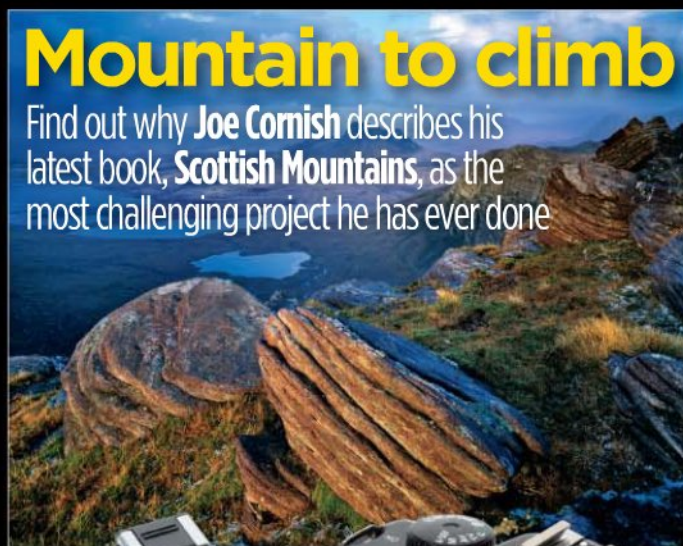
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Sigma 10-20mm f/3.5 EX DC HSM vs Tokina AT-X 124 AF Pro DXII 12-24mm f/4

Super-wideangle zooms

BOTH these lenses are designed solely for the APS-C-size sensor format, not full-frame cameras. In terms of the APS-C format they give a full-frame/135 film equivalent viewing angle similar to 15-30mm and 18-36mm lenses respectively. It is therefore towards the shorter focal length of their span that they may qualify as 'super-wides'. With the APS-C-format diagonal of approximately 27mm, the Tokina lens comes near to offering very wide to 'normal' viewing angle coverage.

Both have a 2x zoom factor. The apparently insignificant 2mm less of the Sigma lens, in fact, gives a significant increase in design problems, especially for digital imaging. This is particularly relevant to the digital camera's susceptibility to vignetting in the corners of the frame. In that respect, it is notable that both lenses maintain their maximum aperture over the focal length span. The difference between the Sigma lens's f/3.5 and the Tokina lens's f/4 is broadly of notional rather than practical importance, though

Geoffrey Crawley looks at two extreme wideangle zoom lenses for APS-C-size sensors, one from Sigma and one from Tokina

the former 'sounds' better.

When dealing with lenses of this specialist type, it is important to consider their likely applications. If you are looking for accurate, distortion-free drawing, as needed for linear subjects such as architecture, aperture is secondary. Landscape, too, does not require a wide aperture. If, on the other hand, it is people and events that are to be covered, then a wide aperture becomes the primary concern to

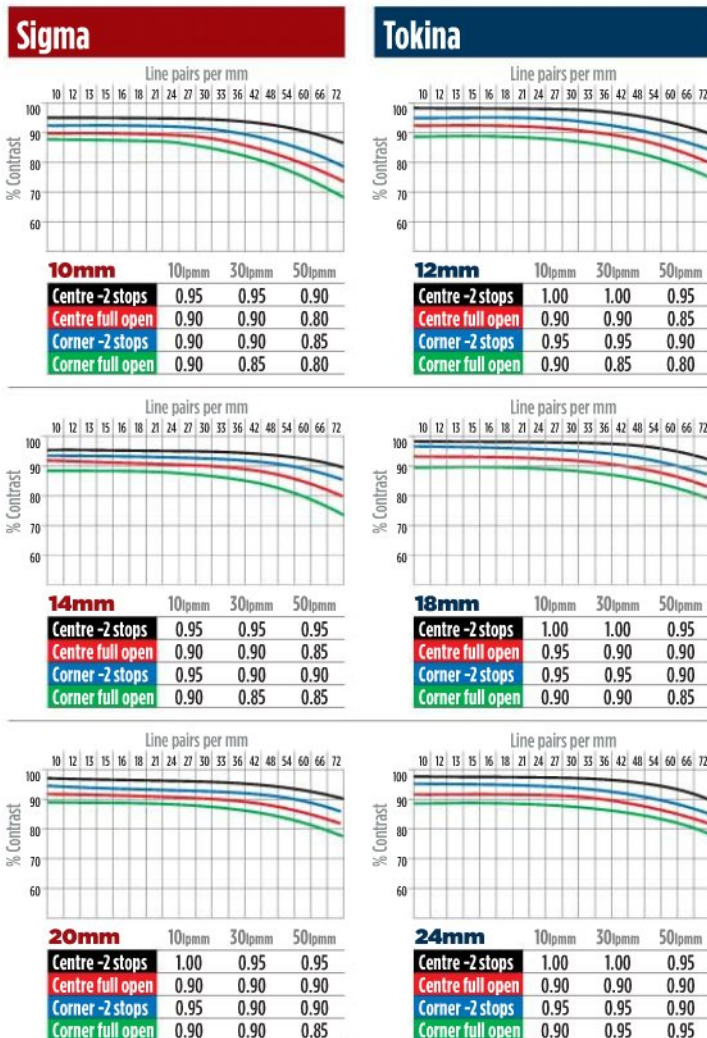
enable coverage in poorer light.

When aperture is really important, a monofocal will be the best choice as, certainly for the very wide and super-wideangle focal lengths, they are likely to be up to two stops faster than a zoom lens covering that angle. Drawing is also likely to be better, widening the lens's potential. So, with these two optics, it is interesting to find out for what uses they are suited.



Sharpness/definition

At 12mm, the Tokina lens gives better sharpness and definition than the Sigma optic at its widest focal length of 10mm. Towards the middle of their focal ranges the performance gap narrows, although the Tokina optic still gives slightly better performance. At their longest focal lengths of 20mm (Sigma) and 24mm (Tokina) both lenses effectively give equal sharpness and definition



Sigma 10mm



Sigma 20mm

Sigma

10-20mm f/3.5 EX DC HSM

THE lens comes in Sigma's 'EX' top finish and livery, distinguished by the firm's own dead-black finish against which the focal length numerals stand out particularly boldly. The trim is in deep gold, which is reserved for the lens identification and a ring up front that is nearly concealed by the broad front rim of the barrel. This rim, which increases the main barrel diameter by 10mm to 87mm, is necessary to allow the fitting of a lens hood and filters of sufficient width to avoid vignetting at the shorter focal lengths. The supplied lens hood is of the 'petal' type, which is permissible as the lens front section does not rotate during focusing.

Any expectation that lenses for the APS-C format would show a material reduction in bulk over those for the full-frame format has now been abandoned. The traditional rule was that halving the format diagonal reduces overall build by a third. That gain has been lost by the special need in lenses for digital cameras to illuminate the edges and corners of the sensor's frame more fully than those for film cameras. The barrel's smallest extension is 88mm from the camera body flange at an approximate focal length of 17mm, extending only a few millimetres at settings either way to 10mm and 20mm. This out-in-out zoom movement is becoming common on wideangle zoom lenses, though it is not so on the 12-24mm Tokina optic, which is an older design. The 520g weight of the Sigma lens is sufficient to make it a substantial unit on the camera. However, its fairly short length makes it easy enough to

balance and operate.

Focusing is by internal lens group movement. There is no external barrel movement during autofocus. Manual focus was nicely smooth and definite, as was the zoom movement. The focusing ring is right up front. Manual fine-tuning of focus when in autofocus mode is allowed. The zoom control ring, indexed at 10mm, 12mm, 14mm, 17mm and 20mm, is near centre on the barrel. The only other feature on the barrel is the Auto/Manual focus mode slider.

Optically

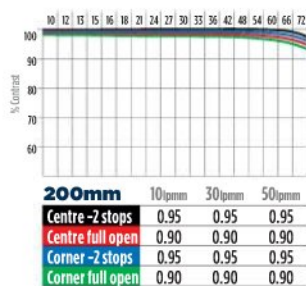
The Sigma 10-20mm f/3.5 zoom lens is a development of the firm's f/4-5.6 design of the same focal length span, launched in 2005. AP reviewed it favourably in AP 5 December 2005. The rapid upgrade is a measure of how quickly understanding of the special optical requirements in the design of lenses for digital cameras has advanced in just a few years.

The changes are substantial. The 14-elements-in-10-groups construction has been reduced to 13 and 10. Less use has been made of the expensive super-low dispersion glasses. There are four aspheric elements rather than three, and the diaphragm is seven-bladed rather than six. This will improve shapes in out-of-focus areas, giving better bokeh. Two of the aspheric elements are precision moulded and two are hybrid: a synthetic aspheric bonded to a glass base. As in the earlier design, one aspheric is the field lens at the rear, projecting the image onto the sensor.

The former three super low

Understanding the graphs

The graphs shown here demonstrate the ability of the lenses on test to resolve detail. As the lines move to the right along the horizontal axis, the detail the lens is asked to record becomes finer, thus the lens becomes less successful at recording it accurately. Each sloping line on the graph represents measurements taken from a particular area of the image – the centre and the corner – with both measurements being made for images taken using the widest aperture as well as with the aperture closed by two stops. The grid places a numerical value on the success



of the lens in recording these details at three line-pair-per-millimetre points: 10lp/mm, 30lp/mm and 50lp/mm. The graph on the left demonstrates what we would expect from a near perfect lens. As the lines are all very close together, the performance of the lens is almost as good at the edge of the frame as it is in the middle – where lenses are at their best. The lines stay close to the top of the graph, as the lens is able to clearly resolve very fine detail. All lenses have a limit to what they can resolve, and this is shown where the lines of the graph begin to slope downwards. In this example the lens only starts to struggle at the 72lp/mm point.



Tokina 12mm



Tokina 24mm

This is an affordable super-wideangle zoom lens with a fine performance and the ability to satisfy most general needs

dispersion (SLD) elements are replaced by two in the lower-cost and easier-to-configure extra dispersion (ED) glass. The remaining SLD element appears in the group behind the diaphragm, which provides the internal focus movement. Overall, an advantageous redistribution of corrections allows a slightly higher $f/3.5$ aperture to be maintained across the zoom range. The design is, by necessity, strongly retrofocus: the back focus is greater than the focal length. At 10mm the factor is approximately 6.5x.

Performance

A viewing angle of 102° is wide on any format. The fact that the APS-C design is around half the area of full frame does not make it any the easier to cover at that angle. Generally, the 10–20mm $f/3.5$ Sigma zoom lens lives up to the expectations for an optic of this specification and price range. In terms of resolving power/contrast, results showed the usual improvement as focal length increased

and the viewing angle narrowed.

Overall, its image contrast is medium high. It is important to use the supplied petal lens hood in bright sun to prevent flare inducing highlights just outside the viewing angle. In fact, as with any super-wideangle lens, its hood should always be used. As usual with special optical glass elements, colour is on the warm side of neutral. A good stepped greyscale is produced.

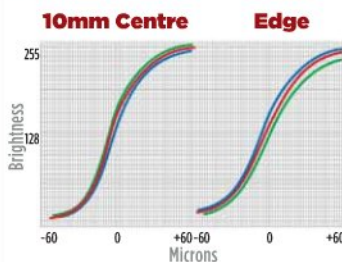
As regards drawing, the distortion figures at the wide, 10mm end are, as expected, the highest, but for a zoom lens this is satisfactory. Those for 14mm are excellent, falling off to cushioning at 20mm, though not unacceptably. There is a sense that distortion had been optimised for the mid-focal length range. Lateral colour correction is maintained centrally across the focal length span, with some minor deviation towards the frame edges, but not of a major level.

Vignetting is marked at 10mm and full aperture, again a penalty of a very wide zoom lens. By 12mm, there is a gradual improvement and from thereon stopping down to $f/5.6$ reduces it significantly. Surprisingly, from 14–20mm and two or three stops down, coverage on full frame film is quite useful. That may appeal to owners of APS-C-format cameras who also use a 35mm film SLR. The hypersonic AF motor drive was quiet at 23dB over 36dB background. At 330 milliseconds the AF drive functioned rapidly from infinity to closest focus. This is an affordable super-wideangle zoom lens with a fine performance and the ability to satisfy most general photographic needs.

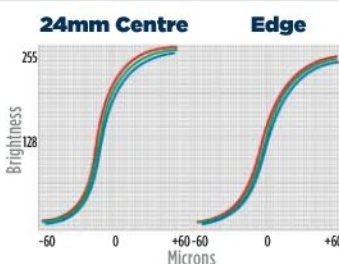
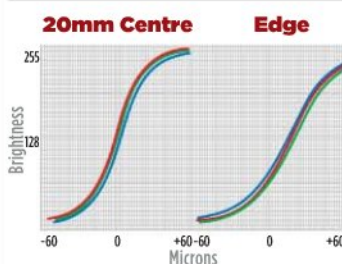
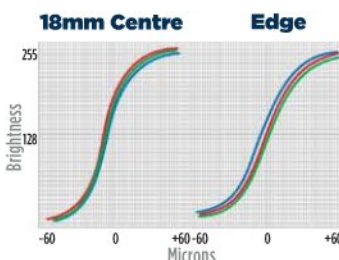
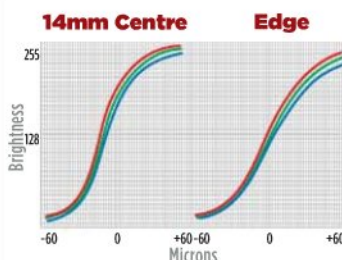
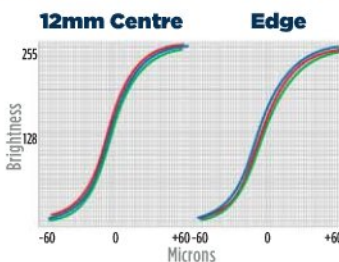
Chromatic aberration

From the graphs, it can be seen that the Tokina optic betters the Sigma in terms of chromatic aberration, especially at the wideangle and mid-range settings. Edge performance is lower from both optics compared to the centre, but the Tokina lens gives slightly better performance overall

Sigma



Tokina



Understanding the graphs

Lateral chromatic aberration induces colour fringing and loss of sharpness, so edges are rimmed with colour and are soft. These graphs show the degree of error when the ISO 12233 slanted knife-edge test is performed at the key focal length settings. Measurements are taken from the centre of the image and from the edge, where lens performance dips.

The greater the divergence of the red, green and blue lines, the greater the error and the more likely the lens is to exhibit the effects of chromatic aberration.

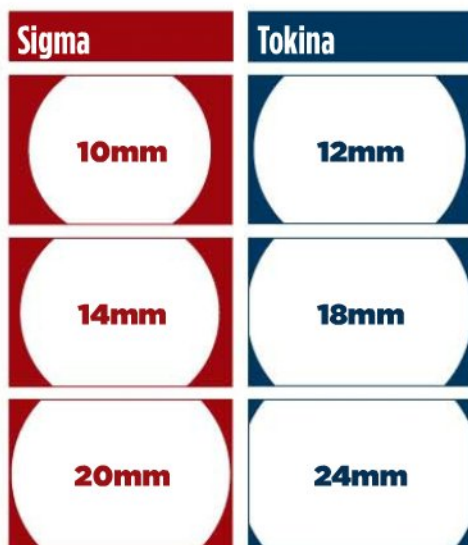
Some divergence in the lines is to be expected, especially at the shorter focal length settings of zoom lenses and at the edge of the image frame. It is the overall appearance that is important rather than the detail of the curves. The graphs below left show typical good and bad results



Vignetting

It is clear from these diagrams that the Sigma optic gives fairly severe vignetting, especially at its widest, 10mm, focal length

These diagrams indicate the vignetting characteristics of each lens at full aperture. They show the degree of difference in the illumination between the centre of the image frame and the corners of the frame. Measured in EV, figures larger than 1/3EV will be clearly visible. Deviations of 1/6EV and below will not show. The darkest areas indicate shading of about 1/3EV and the lighter areas 1/6EV, but in reality the effect is graduated.



	Sigma			Tokina			
	10mm	14mm	20mm	12mm	18mm	24mm	
f/3.5	1	2/3	1/2	f/4	1/2	1/3	1/6
f/5	2/3	<1/2	<1/3	f/5.6	1/3	1/6	-
f/7.1	1/3	<1/3	-	f/8	1/6	-	-

Both optics show noticeable corner shading 'wide open', but the Sigma lens is worse and, even when stopped

down, corner shading is still noticeable at the wide end and middle of its focal range compared to the Tokina

Curvilinear distortion

These figures illustrate the degree of 'bend' in a straight line that was recorded 4mm from the top edge of the frame, with '-' indicating barrel distortion and '+' indicating pincushion distortion.

	Sigma			Tokina		
	10mm	14mm	20mm	12mm	18mm	24mm
7.5m	-0.72%	-0.21%	+0.25%	-0.37%	-0.35%	+0.21%
25m	-0.68%	-0.12%	+0.38%	-0.22%	-0.16%	+0.16%
∞	-0.52%	-0.15%	+0.50%	-0.14%	-0.10%	+0.12%

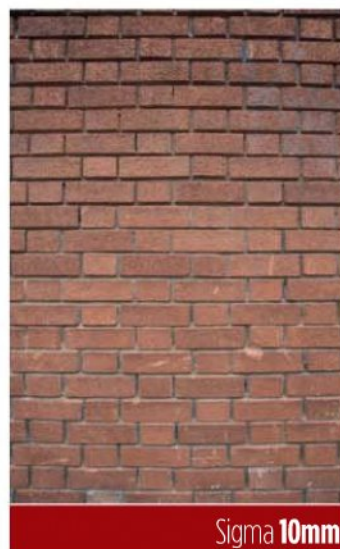
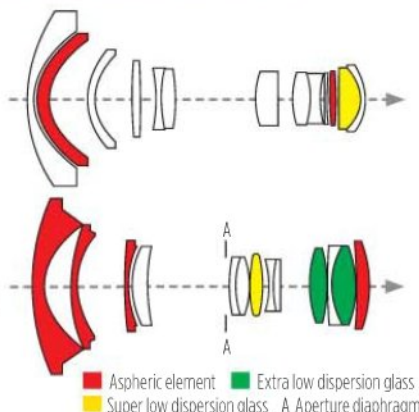
At its 10mm setting, severe barrel distortion can be seen from the Sigma optic, changing to pincushion

distortion towards 20mm. The Tokina lens gives less distortion overall and almost none at infinity

Lens construction

Sigma The front portion of this lens shows the typical double-Gauss construction. The thick lens as the first element of the rear group is unusual, as is the placement of the SLD element at the rear of the lens.

Tokina The three aspherical elements in the three front groups serve to correct spherical aberration early in the light path. Colour correction, courtesy of the extra low dispersion glass, occurs well to the rear of the lens.



Tokina

AT-X 124 AF Pro DXII 12-24mm f/4

LIKE the Sigma 10-20mm f/3.5 lens, the Tokina 12-24mm f/4 optic is an improved model. The earlier lens of this specification was introduced in 2005. In this instance, though, the changes are minimal. There is an enhanced multi-layer, anti-reflection coating and autofocus drive motor for the Nikon-fitting version. This makes it suitable for camera models that lack a body motor, such as the Nikon D40 and D60. It is available only in Canon and Nikon mounts.

The finish and livery are standard Japanese: matt black barrel with gold trim on a ring on the front rim and for the lens identification characters. The zoom focal length indices are in bold white, marked at 12mm, 15mm, 18mm, 20mm and 24mm. It weighs 570g, which is somewhat heavier than the Sigma lens, probably because it reaches a longer top focal length. The barrel is correspondingly broader at 77.5mm, and 84mm across the front, filter and petal hood attachment rim. Unlike the Sigma lens, the zoom movement of the Tokina optic is internal so there is no change in length over the focal length range.

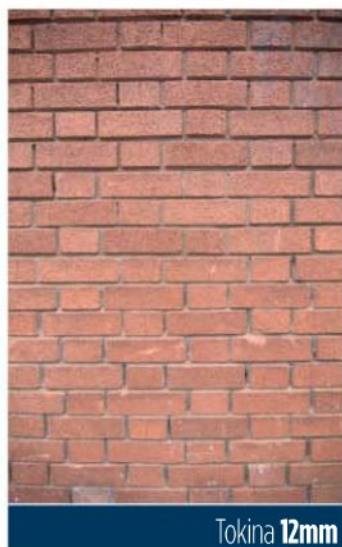
The knurled rubber manual focusing ring is broad at 18mm and right up front. Its prominence seems to indicate that manual focus is expected to be used often. The lens has Tokina's instant switch between auto and manual focus. It is operated by snapping the focusing ring sharply forward from the manual position for auto and vice versa. Whether this is easier than manual fine-tuning after autofocus has locked on is a matter of individual preference. In its favour is

the fact that the shutter release does not need to be kept half-depressed when tweaking focus, in order to prevent the AF taking over again. The zoom control ring is narrower and well back on the barrel, but not so far back as to cramp the fingers between the lens and camera body. Its rotation is smooth and with definite resistance, but without being stiff.

Optically

The differences between this lens and the 2005 version are not in the basic design but in the minimal changes mentioned earlier. The construction uses 13 elements in 11 groups. Two elements are aspheric. The specification seems to imply the use of more than one element in super low (colour) dispersion (SD) glass, though the schematic appears only to show a single one. That is at the back, forming a doublet with a convex/concave element as a field lens. The two aspherics – plastic moulded – are there to reduce spherical aberration. The lens close focuses to 30cm, staying somewhat further off than the Sigma optic at 24cm.

The configuration differs from that of the Sigma lens in one marked feature, though the focal length span is not that different. The Sigma lens's complex five-element, three-group component behind the iris, which provides internal focusing, is replaced by a single thick element, and a greater use of thick lenses is made in the rear section. Another noticeable difference is the absence of the rounded corner baffle present in the Sigma lens behind the optical cell. This



Tokina 12mm



Tokina 24mm

“ Little has been changed in the optical configuration of the lens in this second model, and it appears that there was no need to do so ”

cuts off oblique non-image forming rays from reaching the camera dark chamber and thus causing flare.

A strong retrofocus design is necessary and this factor at 12mm focal length is approximately x5, representing the difference in diameter between the entrance pupil of a lens and the exit pupil. In a 'normal' lens they would be about the same. In a retrofocus lens the entrance pupil is smaller than the exit – and vice versa for a telephoto design.

Performance

Performance in resolving power is very good at delivering high-contrast detail across the focal length range. Corner fall-off is minimised even at 12mm and full aperture, though the optimum was reached at around two stops down. The narrowing viewing angle that comes with increased focal length produces improved coverage, as usual. The use of the petal-type lens hood provided is

at all times advisable, though no problems with flare were actually encountered. With super-wideangle optics at certain times in the day, notably in winter, it can be difficult to exclude the sun from the image area. The top overhang of a petal lens hood is designed to mask it and other top highlights.

In terms of drawing, the figures show results of near monofocal quality. There is a factor to bear in mind, however: correction appears to be of the 'wave' type. Normally, distortion follows a continuous curve path, bowing in or out across the field. It is also possible to vary the distortion – 'in-out' as it were, so that the edges of the field do not end up much displaced. Regarding the given figures as a \pm tolerance gives a rough equivalence guide.

Vignetting is well controlled and, apart from at 12mm and full aperture, it could generally be ignored as a factor. Images show good neutrality with well-saturated colours. Lateral colour correction, the cause of fringing, is very well controlled across the zoom span. Although it lacks a supersonic AF drive, the noise level is quite low, at 32dB over 35dB background. The autofocus speed from infinity to closest is fairly quick at 490 milliseconds. From just below the 20mm index the lens is viable to cover the frame on a 35mm full-frame film camera. Little has been changed in the optical configuration of the lens in this second model, and it appears there was no need to do so: 'if it ain't broke, don't fix it'.

Data file

	Sigma	Tokina
	Sigma Imaging UK, 13 Little Mundells, Welwyn Garden City, Hertfordshire AL7 1EW. Tel: 01707 329 999 Web: www.sigma-imaging-uk.com	Kenro Ltd, Greenbridge Road, Swindon, Wiltshire SN3 3LH Tel: 01793 615 836 Web: www.kenro.co.uk
RRP	£649.99	£724.50
Lens mount	Canon, Nikon, Pentax, Sigma, Sony (all APS-C only)	Nikon F, Canon EF-S (both APS-C only)
Max aperture	f/3.5	f/4
Angle of view	102.4 - 63.8°	99-61°
Near focus	0.24m	0.3m
Diaphragm blades	7	9
Filter size	82mm	77mm
Weight	520g	540g
Measured focal length	9.9-19.8mm	11.88-23.8mm
Dimensions	87.3x88.2mm	84x89.5mm

Our verdict

To an extent these two zooms lenses are not strictly comparable. The Sigma optic extends the focal length at the wideangle end to a small but noticeable degree. At the 20mm long end there are not many zoom lenses available of a span that will link on into the tele region. The Tokina optic's 24mm top end focal length is close to the usual for the APS-C format. Its 12mm minimum focal length is sufficiently wide for most purposes, with an 18mm viewing angle equivalence. In optical performance, the Tokina lens has the edge over the Sigma optic, due in part to the lower design demands of its zoom span. In particular, its curvilinear distortion level is sufficiently reduced to allow more critical applications. The difference in maximum aperture is not a crucial factor, although for event photography at least, every little counts. It is rather for general use, where an extreme viewing angle is useful, that the Sigma lens will find its market. It also comes at an affordable price. Its nearest independent competitors are Tokina's 10-17mm and Tamron's 10-24mm lenses.

In handling there is little or no difference in the ergonomic ease of the two, except in the push/pull, auto/manual focus clutch of the Tokina optic. This latter lens has a nine-bladed diaphragm, which is rated by bokeh experts as ideal for the smooth transition of shapes away from the focus plane. The Sigma zoom's increase from six to seven blades in the new model shows an awareness of this trend. In a nutshell, the Tokina lens offers top image quality in a very useful focal length span, while the Sigma optic stretches the viewing angle with, in everyday practical terms, an accompanying performance of only slightly lower quality.

Sigma 10-20mm f/3.5 EX DC HSM

Specification	●●●●●●●●	26/30
Build	●●●●●●●●	17/20
Handling	●●●●●●●●	18/20
Performance	●●●●●●●●	25/30

86%

Tokina AT-X 124 AF Pro DXII 12-24mm f/4

Specification	●●●●●●●●	25/30
Build	●●●●●●●●	18/20
Handling	●●●●●●●●	18/20
Performance	●●●●●●●●	28/30

89%

“ The Tokina lens has a nine-bladed diaphragm, which is rated by bokeh experts as ideal for the smooth transition of shapes away from the focus plane ”

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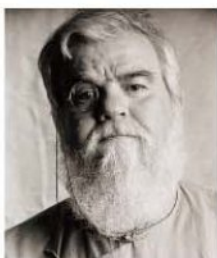
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... SAYS WE SHOULD ABANDON THE
ONLINE BARGAIN HUNT, AND GO
OUT AND TAKE SOME PICTURES



ROGER HICKS is a much-published author on photography. He has written more than three dozen books on the subject, many in partnership with his wife, Frances Schultz. Roger started photography as a teenager in the 1960s and worked professionally in a London advertising studio in the mid-1970s. He has been a freelance photographer/writer since 1981, contributing to many photography magazines, including 'Shutterbug' in America. Visit his website at www.rogerandfrances.com.

A CYNIC is someone who knows the price of everything, and the value of nothing. Much like eBay, really. The things that sell on eBay never fail to amaze me. Auctions are often lauded as the purest form of commerce, because the price paid is by definition satisfactory to the buyer, and as long as it is above the reserve set by the seller it is satisfactory to him, too. Even so, you sometimes have to wonder about the wisdom, or even sanity, of both parties to the transaction.

The best analogy I can think of is a sort of milk-and-water feeding frenzy. Instead of sleek, powerful sharks killing and eating big fish, it is more like a whale vacuuming up plankton. An awful lot of what is sold on eBay must surely be bought solely because it costs so little. Unfortunately, this is not the same as being affordable. Rather, it is the illusion of affordability. Any one item may be trivial, or even any ten items, if you do not get too carried away, but a hundred items, even at a few pounds each plus another few pounds for carriage, are another matter entirely.

Few of us can resist a bargain, it's true, and this is how jumble sales, charity shops and indeed camera fairs make their money. But eBay is a jumble sale that is always open, and many people seem to live their lives by proxy through the goods they acquire on it. I'm not knocking eBay itself, which is one of the most brilliant and successful commercial ideas of my lifetime: I'm just knocking the jumble-sale mentality it seems to engender in some people. This is the mentality of cheap, quick, easy acquisitions with no great penalty if things go wrong.

This persistent acquisition of near-rubbish can rob us of the wherewithal to buy the things we really want. We spend all our money on stuff we fancy but wouldn't really care if we never got, and have none left for things we actually do want.

What intrigues me now, though, is that more and more people are doing the same thing with the rest of their lives. I heard recently on that one-quarter of all internet traffic is 'social networking', things like Facebook and MySpace. The wallah who delivered this statistical gem spoke enthusiastically of a possible future when we shall all be able to 'meet' our 'online friends' in a 'virtual room'.

Hold on a moment. 'Virtual room' is patent drivel, but 'meet' and 'online friends' seem to come very close to me to what used to be called 'correspondents' or even 'pen pals'. Of course, it is entirely possible for 'pen pals' and indeed 'online friends' to become very good friends indeed: marriages have been known to spring from these sources. But there is an enormous difference between people we meet face to face, and eat and drink with, and hug when we see them, and people with

whom we correspond, be it via real letters or via the internet.

The worrying part is that 'online friends' seem to be edging out the normal variety, simply because of their cheap, quick, easy availability,

just as 'bargains' on eBay can edge out more valuable and durable acquisitions. Dealing with real people in the real world isn't always easy, but online e-friends can be gathered and discarded in the social equivalent of a jumble sale.

The relevance of this to photography is that in its very nature, photography has always dealt with the real world. It is true that you can make astonishingly real pseudo-photographs using the right software – images where nothing in the picture was ever in front of a lens or captured on film or a sensor – but this virtual imaging is not, I suggest, why (or how) most photographers love photography. Rather, we are fascinated by the world around us, and we want to capture it, interpret it and show it to people who may not notice it as much as they might.

This is why, just lately, I've been making a conscious effort to spend less time online, and more time taking pictures. Most days, if the weather is tolerable, I go for a short walk just to take pictures: I've even got a couple of places I can shoot on rainy days. So why not go out and take some pictures of your own? After all, real life is a lot more interesting than cyberspace. **AP**

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and we want to capture it, interpret it and
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Editorial

Amateur Photographer, IPC Media, Blue Fin Building,
110 Southwark Street, London SE1 0SU

Telephone 0203 148 4138 Fax 0203 148 8130

Email amateurphotographer@ipcmedia.com

Subscriptions

Telephone 0845 676 7778

Advertising

Amateur Photographer, IPC Media, Blue Fin Building, 110
Southwark Street, London SE1 0SU. Telephone: 0203 148 2517

Email lee_morris@ipcmedia.com

Classified telephone 0203 148 2929. Fax: 0203 148 8158

Display telephone 0203 148 2517. Fax: 0203 148 8158

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Special thanks to

Rosie Barratt (picture returns) 0203 148 4121

Email appicturedesk@ipcmedia.com

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